# It Rhymes With Lust

BY

DRAKE WALLER

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*An Original Picture Novel*

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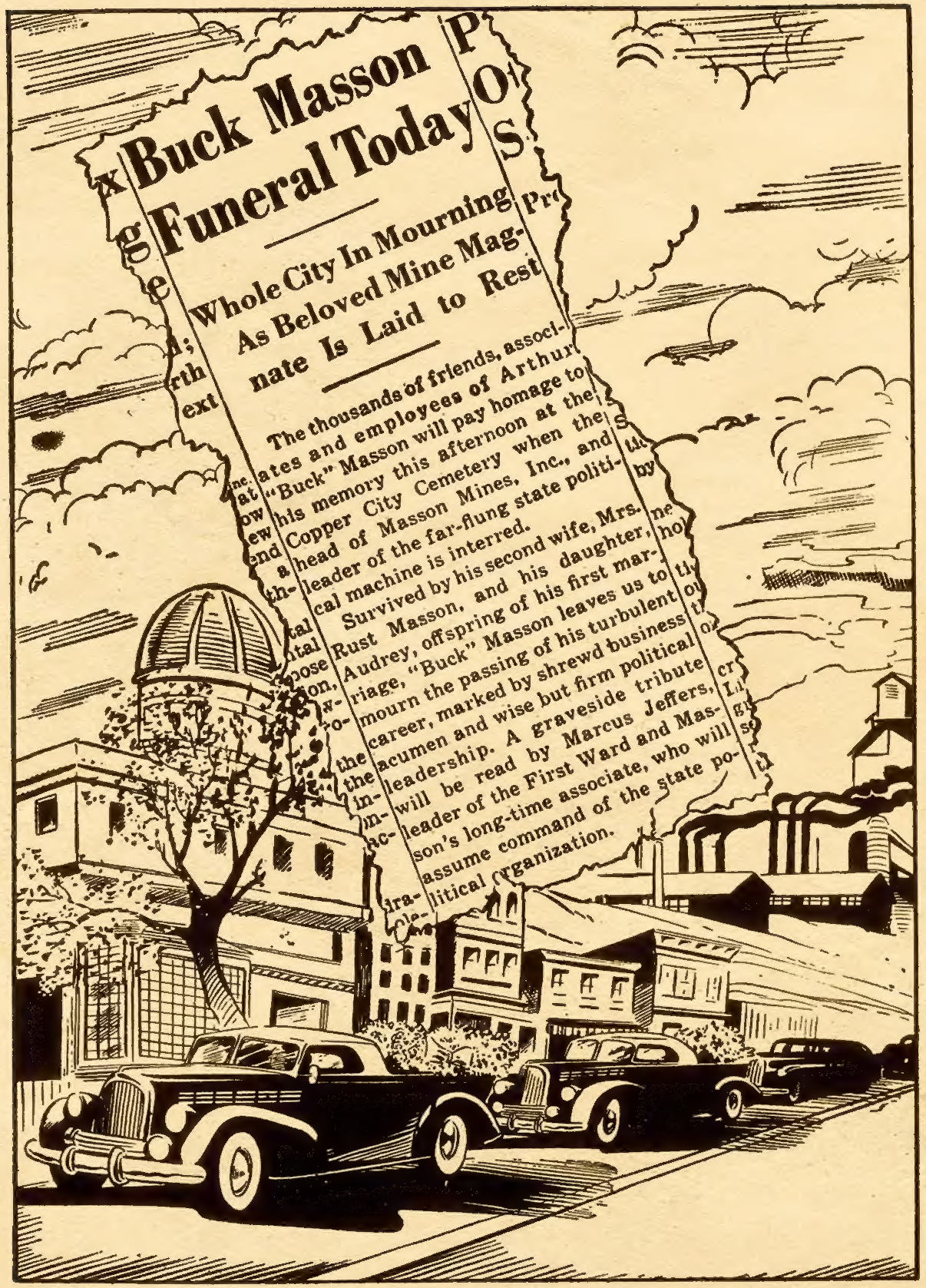
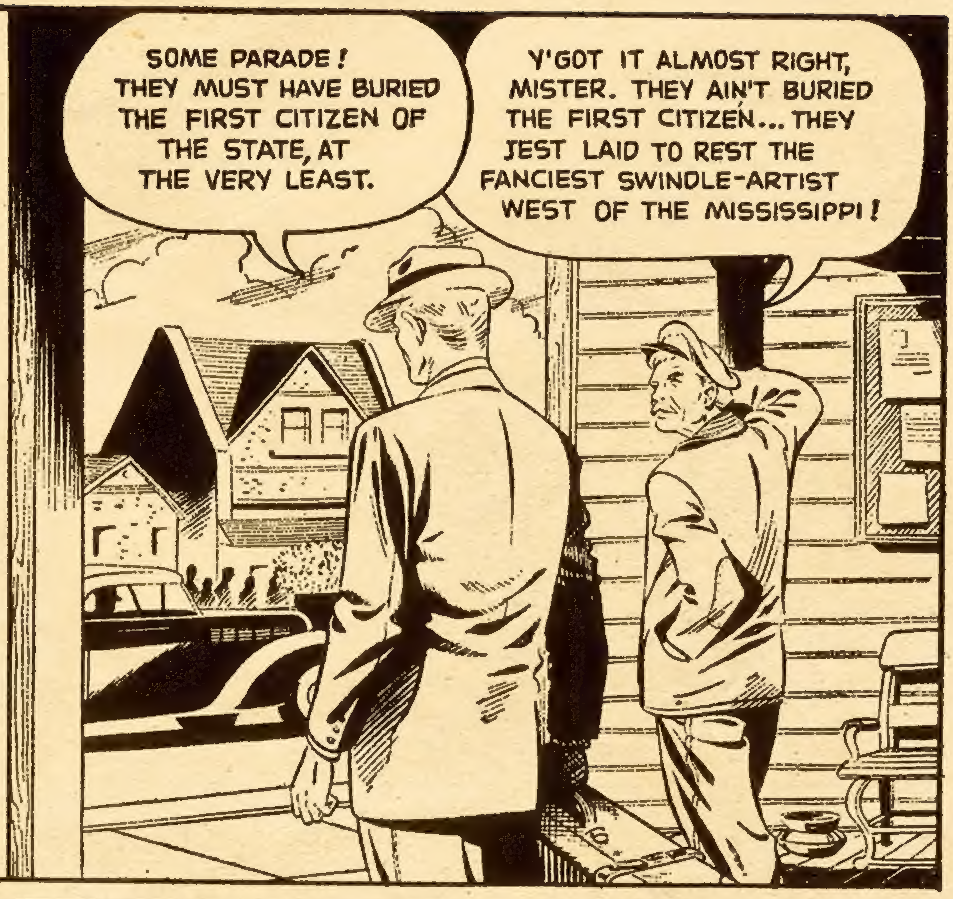
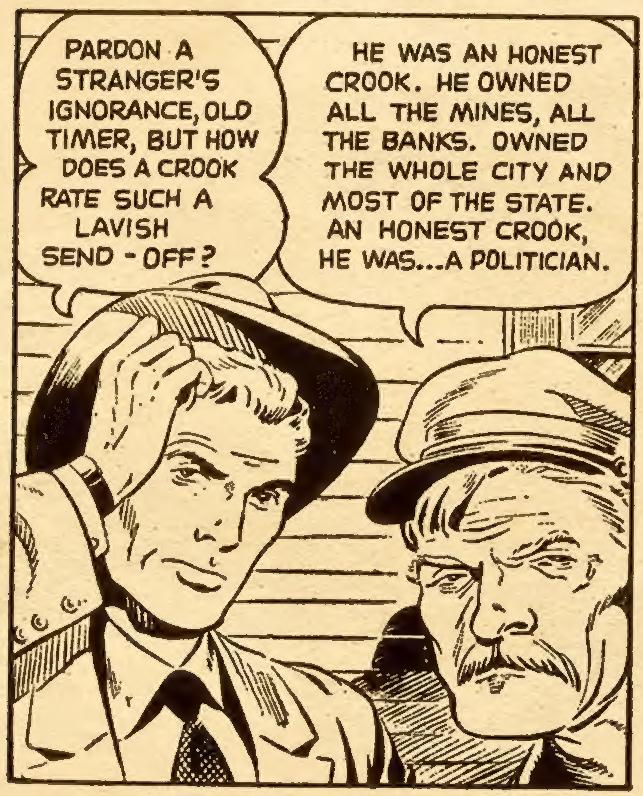
THE BALDHEADED CONDUCTOR CLEARED HIS THROAT AND SHOUTED: "ALL OFF FOR *COPPER CITY!*" HAL WEBER TUGGED NERVOUSLY AT HIS HAT BRIM, PICKED UP HIS BATTERED SUITCASE, STEPPED OFF THE 3:14 EXPRESS AND ONTO A WILD, DANGEROUS MERRY-GO-ROUND OF BULLETS AND EMBRACES.

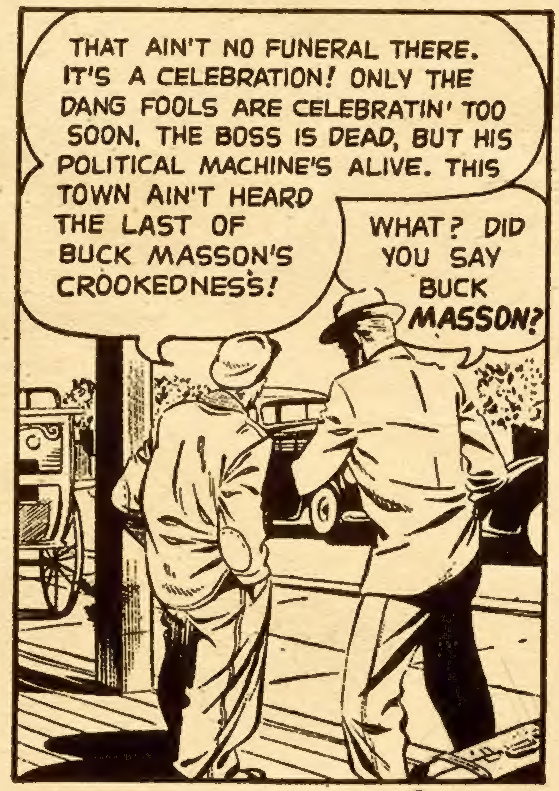
FOLLOW HIM AS HE WEAVES THROUGH A TANGLED NET OF DOUBLE-CROSS, DYNAMITE AND DISASTER WITH A WOMAN WHO BARTERED TORRID KISSES FOR HIS SOUL, A MAN WHO SPOKE WITH A .38 AUTOMATIC AND A GIRL IN WHOSE SHINING EYES HE SAW REFLECTED THE TATTERED RAGS OF HIS CONSCIENCE.

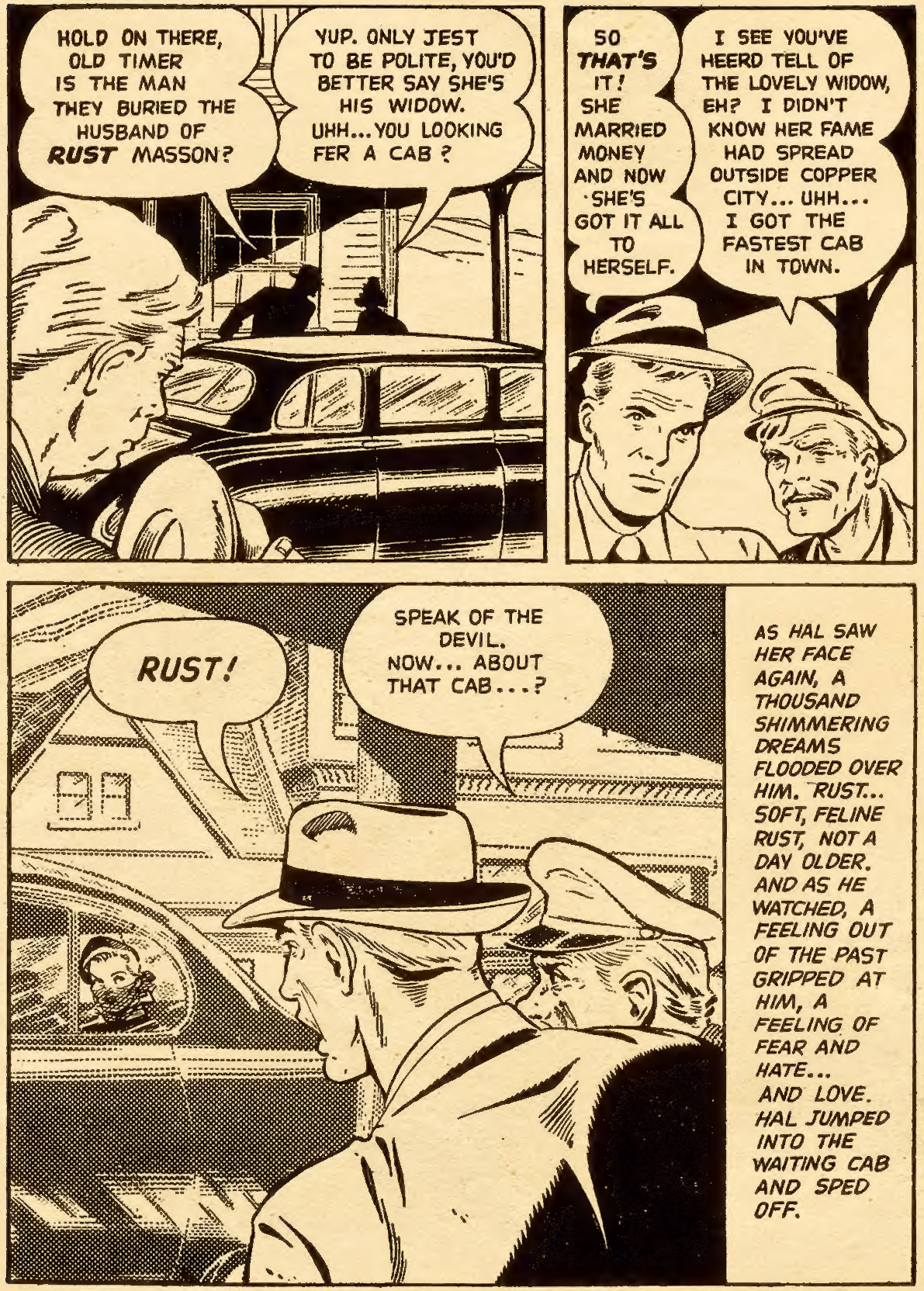

Buck Masson Funeral Today
Whole City In Mourning As Beloved Mine Magnate Is Laid to Rest
The thousands of friends, associates and employees of Arthur "Buck" Masson will pay homage to his memory this afternoon at the Copper City Cemetery when the head of Masson Mines, Inc., and leader of the far-flung state political machine is interred.
Survived by his second wife, Mrs. Rust Masson, and his daughter, Audrey, offspring of his first marriage, "Buck" Masson leaves us to mourn the passing of his turbulent career, marked by shrewd business acumen and wise but firm political leadership. A graveside tribute will be read by Marcus Jeffers, leader of the First Ward and Masson's long-time associate, who will assume command of the state political organization.

AS THE LONG FUNERAL CORTEGE SNAKED ITS WAY BACK FROM THE CEMETERY THROUGH COPPER CITY, HAL WEBER, FRESH OFF THE 3:14 EXPRESS FROM THE EAST, PAUSED ON THE DEPOT STEPS AND WATCHED WITH INTEREST. IT WAS SIGNIFICANT, SEEING A FUNERAL ON HIS FIRST DAY IN THIS SPRAWLING WESTERN CITY, BUT HE DIDN'T KNOW IT AT THE TIME.

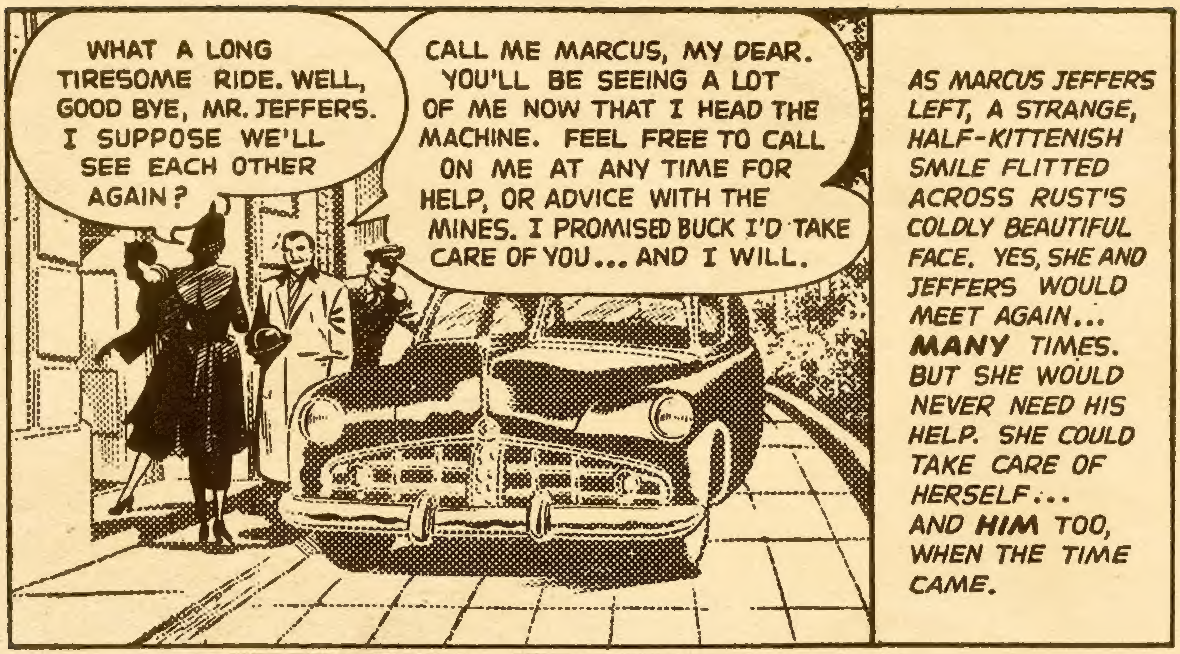

SOME PARADE! THEY MUST HAVE BURIED THE FIRST CITIZEN OF THE STATE, AT THE VERY LEAST.
Y'GOT IT ALMOST RIGHT, MISTER. THEY AIN'T BURIED THE FIRST CITIZEN... THEY JEST LAID TO REST THE FANCIEST SWINDLE-ARTIST WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI!


PARDON A STRANGER'S IGNORANCE, OLD TIMER, BUT HOW DOES A CROOK RATE SUCH A LAVISH SEND-OFF?
HE WAS AN HONEST CROOK. HE OWNED ALL THE MINES, ALL THE BANKS. OWNED THE WHOLE CITY AND MOST OF THE STATE. AN HONEST CROOK, HE WAS...A POLITICIAN.

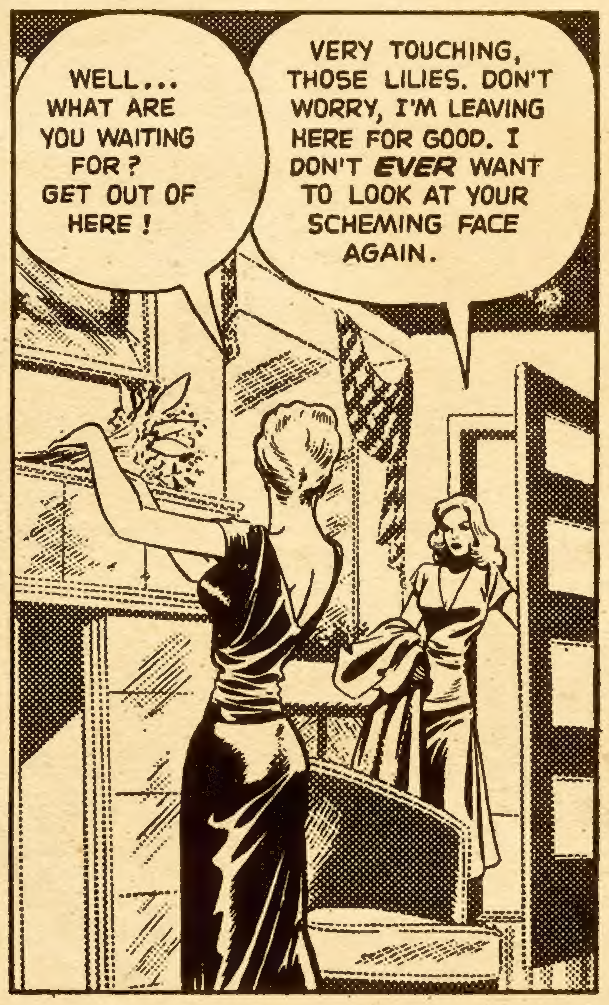

THAT AIN'T NO FUNERAL THERE. IT'S A CELEBRATION! ONLY THE DANG FOOLS ARE CELEBRATIN' TOO SOON. THE BOSS IS DEAD, BUT HIS POLITICAL MACHINE'S ALIVE. THIS TOWN AIN'T HEARD THE LAST OF BUCK MASSON'S CROOKEDNESS!
WHAT? DID YOU SAY BUCK MASSON?


HOLD ON THERE, OLD TIMER IS THE MAN THEY BURIED THE HUSBAND OF RUST MASSON?
YUP. ONLY JEST TO BE POLITE, YOU'D BETTER SAY SHE'S HIS WIDOW. UHH... YOU LOOKING FER A CAB ?
SO THAT'S IT! SHE MARRIED MONEY AND NOW SHE'S GOT IT ALL TO HERSELF.
I SEE YOU'VE HEERD TELL OF THE LOVELY WIDOW, EH? I DIDN'T KNOW HER FAME HAD SPREAD OUTSIDE COPPER CITY... UHH... I GOT THE FASTEST CAB IN TOWN.
RUST!
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL. NOW... ABOUT THAT CAB...?
AS HAL SAW HER FACE AGAIN, A THOUSAND SHIMMERING DREAMS FLOODED OVER HIM. RUST... SOFT, FELINE RUST, NOT A DAY OLDER. AND AS HE WATCHED, A FEELING OUT OF THE PAST GRIPPED AT HIM, A FEELING OF FEAR AND HATE... AND LOVE. HAL JUMPED INTO THE WAITING CAB AND SPED OFF.

HAL!
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
RUST, YOU LOOK LIKE YOU SWALLOWED A CANARY. AT LEAST YOU MIGHT ACT SOLEMNLY, EVEN THOUGH YOU DON'T FEEL THAT WAY. WE BURIED FATHER, YOU KNOW.
AUDREY, DEAR, IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS IF I FEEL LIKE SMILING. YOU'RE NO ONE TO PRETEND SORROW OVER BUCK'S DEATH. YOU AVOIDED HIM LIKE THE PLAGUE WHEN HE WAS ALIVE.
I COULDN'T LIKE A MAN WHO DID WHAT HE DID TO MY MOTHER, RUST, BUT AT LEAST I DIDN'T PRETEND TO LOVE HIM!
YOU LITTLE SNIP! HE WAS GOOD ENOUGH TO PAY YOUR BILLS WHILE YOU RAN AROUND WITH A BUNCH OF CRACKPOT STUDENTS. YES, HIS MONEY WAS GOOD ENOUGH.
MONEY? ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU MARRIED HIM FOR?
LADIES... THIS IS A FUNERAL PROCESSION. SHALL WE HAVE A LITTLE DECORUM, A LITTLE RESPECT...FOR THE DEAD?
SHUT YOUR NASTY MOUTH.


WHAT A LONG TIRESOME RIDE. WELL, GOOD BYE, MR. JEFFERS. I SUPPOSE WE'LL SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN?
CALL ME MARCUS, MY DEAR. YOU'LL BE SEEING A LOT OF ME NOW THAT I HEAD THE MACHINE. FEEL FREE TO CALL ON ME AT ANY TIME FOR HELP, OR ADVICE WITH THE MINES. I PROMISED BUCK I'D TAKE CARE OF YOU... AND I WILL.
AS MARCUS JEFFERS LEFT, A STRANGE, HALF-KITTENISH SMILE FLITTED ACROSS RUST'S COLDLY BEAUTIFUL FACE. YES, SHE AND JEFFERS WOULD MEET AGAIN... MANY TIMES. BUT SHE WOULD NEVER NEED HIS HELP. SHE COULD TAKE CARE OF HERSELF... AND HIM TOO, WHEN THE TIME CAME.

MRS. MASSON, MA'AM, THERE'S A GENTLEMAN WAITING IN THE LIBRARY. HE SAYS HIS NAME IS—.
YES, I KNOW. SEND HIM UP TO ME IN FIVE MINUTES. NOW, AUDREY, GO TO YOUR ROOM, AND TRY TO ACT LIKE A SWEET LITTLE GIRL EVEN IF YOU AREN'T.


WELL... WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? GET OUT OF HERE!
VERY TOUCHING, THOSE LILIES. DON'T WORRY, I'M LEAVING HERE FOR GOOD. I DON'T EVER WANT TO LOOK AT YOUR SCHEMING FACE AGAIN.

WONDERFUL, AUDREY, AND GOOD RIDDANCE! I COULD NEVER STAND YOU EITHER.
BUT DON'T THINK YOU'LL GET AWAY WITH ANYTHING, RUST. IF YOU TRY, I'LL MAKE YOU WISH YOU HADN'T. AND THAT'S A PROMISE.
HAL WEBER PUSHED OPEN THE DOOR OF RUST'S SITTING ROOM, WONDERING WHAT IT WAS THAT HAD MADE HER SEND AN URGENT TELEGRAM ASKING HIM TO COME — ON THE VERY DAY HER HUSBAND WAS BEING BURIED. WAS IT BY DESIGN, OR WAS IT JUST A COINCIDENCE?
RUST... I... I...
HELLO, HAL. WELCOME BACK, DARLING... IT'S BEEN SO LONG.

I... UH.. WHO WAS THAT GIRL I PASSED ON THE STAIRS?
MY DAUGHTER. OH, DON'T LOOK SO SHOCKED. SHE'S MY *STEP*-DAUGHTER. AFTER ALL, IT'S ONLY BEEN... LET'S SEE, HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE WE WERE TOGETHER IN NEW YORK? FIVE YEARS? SIX?

TEN YEARS, RUST *TEN!* HOW COULD YOU FORGET? TEN MISERABLE YEARS SINCE YOU WALKED OUT ON ME
LET'S NOT BE MAUDLIN, DARLING, THE PAST IS PAST. WE WERE A LOT YOUNGER THEN. AND WE HAD A LOT TO LEARN... BOTH OF US.

IN THOSE DAYS YOU WERE THE SOLEMN YOUNG STAR REPORTER, EAGER TO CHANGE THE WORLD. WHEN THEY GAVE YOU THE ERLANGER AWARD, THE PUBLICITY HUB-BUB WAS FANTASTIC. TOO MUCH FOR POOR LITTLE ME. I WAS JUST A CHORUS GIRL THEN, DARLING, AND I WAS A LITTLE SCARED, BEING IN LOVE WITH SUCH A CELEBRITY.

IS THAT WHY YOU JILTED ME? TELL ME THE TRUTH, RUST.
SIMPLE ARITHMETIC, DEAREST. YOU HAD TONS OF PRESTIGE, BUT THE SAME OLD FEATHER-WEIGHT SALARY. I WAS A HARD-HEARTED LITTLE WITCH. BUT THAT'S PAST, HAL... YOU'LL SEE.

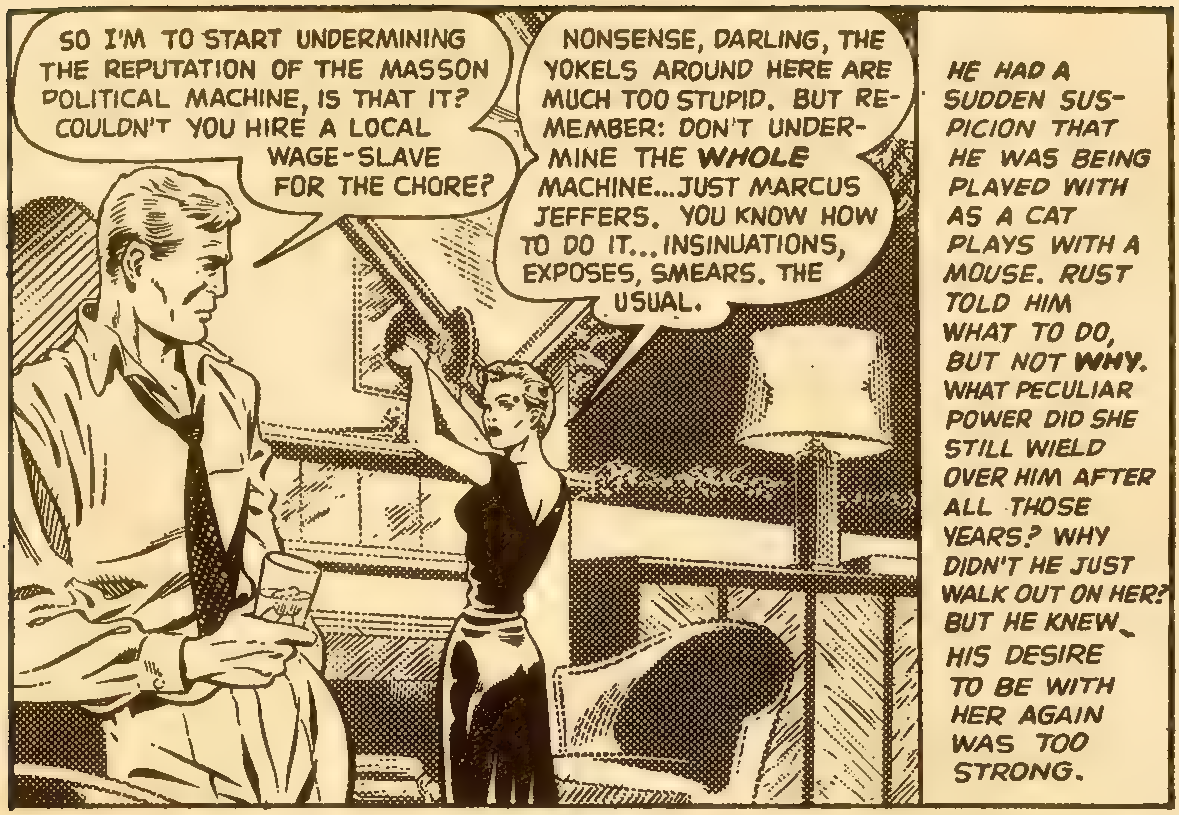
WHEN I GOT YOUR TELEGRAM, RUST, IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE. WHAT SORT OF JOB HAVE YOU GOT FOR ME?
COME SIT BY ME DARLING. YOU SEE, COPPER CITY HAS TWO NEWSPAPERS: THE NEWS-TIMES, WHICH EVERYBODY KNOWS WE OWN, AND THE EXPRESS, WHICH HATES US. YOU'RE THE NEW EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE EXPRESS.

YOU MEAN...? YOU SECRETLY OWN THE EXPRESS TOO?
RIGHT. IT GIVES THE GRUMBLERS A SAFETY-VALVE FOR THEIR— HAL, YOU LOOK SO UNCOMFORTABLE. PERHAPS I SHOULDN'T HAVE BROKEN ALL THE NEWS AT ONCE. TELL ME: WHAT'S... HAPPENED TO YOU THESE PAST TEN YEARS?

FORGET IT, RUST. IT ISN'T PRETTY. YOUR LEAVING HIT ME HARD... BUT I GUESS THE NEWS OF THIS JOB HITS ME EVEN HARDER.
MY POOR DARLING RELAX... DON'T TIGHTEN UP THAT WAY YOU'RE ALL ON EDGE, DEAREST. YOU'VE GOT TO LEARN HOW TO... RELAX!

*HER HEAVY PERFUME WAS HEADY AND SEDUCTIVE. THE TOUCH OF HER FINGERS AROUSING. THERE HAD ALWAYS BEEN SOMETHING IRRESISTABLE ABOUT RUST. HE HAD NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PUT HER OUT OF HIS MIND, EVEN AFTER SHE HAD WALKED OUT ON HIM MANY YEARS AGO ... WITHOUT SAYING GOODBYE. HE HAD DRIFTED IN THOSE YEARS FROM ONE JOB TO ANOTHER, DRENCHING HIS MEMORIES WITH HEFTY DRINKING. BUT NOW SHE WAS REAL, ALIVE, ENTICING! IT WAS HARD TO RATIONALIZE. WITH A SWEEP HE CAUGHT HER IN HIS ARMS.*

To Rusk—
from your
adoring
Buck


SO I'M TO START UNDERMINING THE REPUTATION OF THE MASSON POLITICAL MACHINE, IS THAT IT? COULDN'T YOU HIRE A LOCAL WAGE-SLAVE FOR THE CHORE?
NONSENSE, DARLING, THE YOKELS AROUND HERE ARE MUCH TOO STUPID. BUT REMEMBER: DON'T UNDERMINE THE WHOLE MACHINE...JUST MARCUS JEFFERS. YOU KNOW HOW TO DO IT...INSINUATIONS, EXPOSES, SMEARS. THE USUAL.
HE HAD A SUDDEN SUSPICION THAT HE WAS BEING PLAYED WITH AS A CAT PLAYS WITH A MOUSE. RUST TOLD HIM WHAT TO DO, BUT NOT WHY. WHAT PECULIAR POWER DID SHE STILL WIELD OVER HIM AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS? WHY DIDN'T HE JUST WALK OUT ON HER? BUT HE KNEW— HIS DESIRE TO BE WITH HER AGAIN WAS TOO STRONG.

HERE'S ENOUGH MONEY TO BEGIN WITH. BUY YOURSELF A CAR, SOME NEW CLOTHES. GET AROUND TOWN, MINGLE WITH PEOPLE. LET THEM TAKE A LOOK AT YOU.
RUST, YOU HAVEN'T TOLD ME WHY YOU WANT JEFFERS SMEARED.

LOOK, HAL, DON'T COME HERE AGAIN. I'LL CALL YOU; WE'LL MEET SOMEWHERE PRIVATELY. NO ONE MUST KNOW THAT THE EDITOR OF THE MASSON-HATING EXPRESS IS BEING PAID BY RUST MASSON. GOOD BYE.
BUT RUST...? OH, ALL RIGHT. GOOD BYE.

OLD BUCK MASSON REALLY SEWED THIS TOWN UP TIGHT. BUT HIS CHARMING WIDOW SEEMS ABOUT READY TO RIP OPEN THE SACK AND LET EVERYTHING SPILL. OR IS SHE? I WISH I KNEW WHAT GOES ON BEHIND THAT BEAUTIFUL FACE OF HERS?
MASSON DRUGS, INC.

A LOT OF PEOPLE MUST READ THE EXPRESS, PEOPLE LIKE THAT CABBY THIS AFTERNOON, WHO HATE THE MASSON EMPIRE. POOR SUCKERS! WHAT IF I TOLD THEM THE EXPRESS IS JUST ANOTHER OF RUST'S PROPERTIES? OH, WELL, LET'S SEE WHAT KIND OF BEDS THEY HAVE AROUND HERE.
COPPER CITY EXPRESS

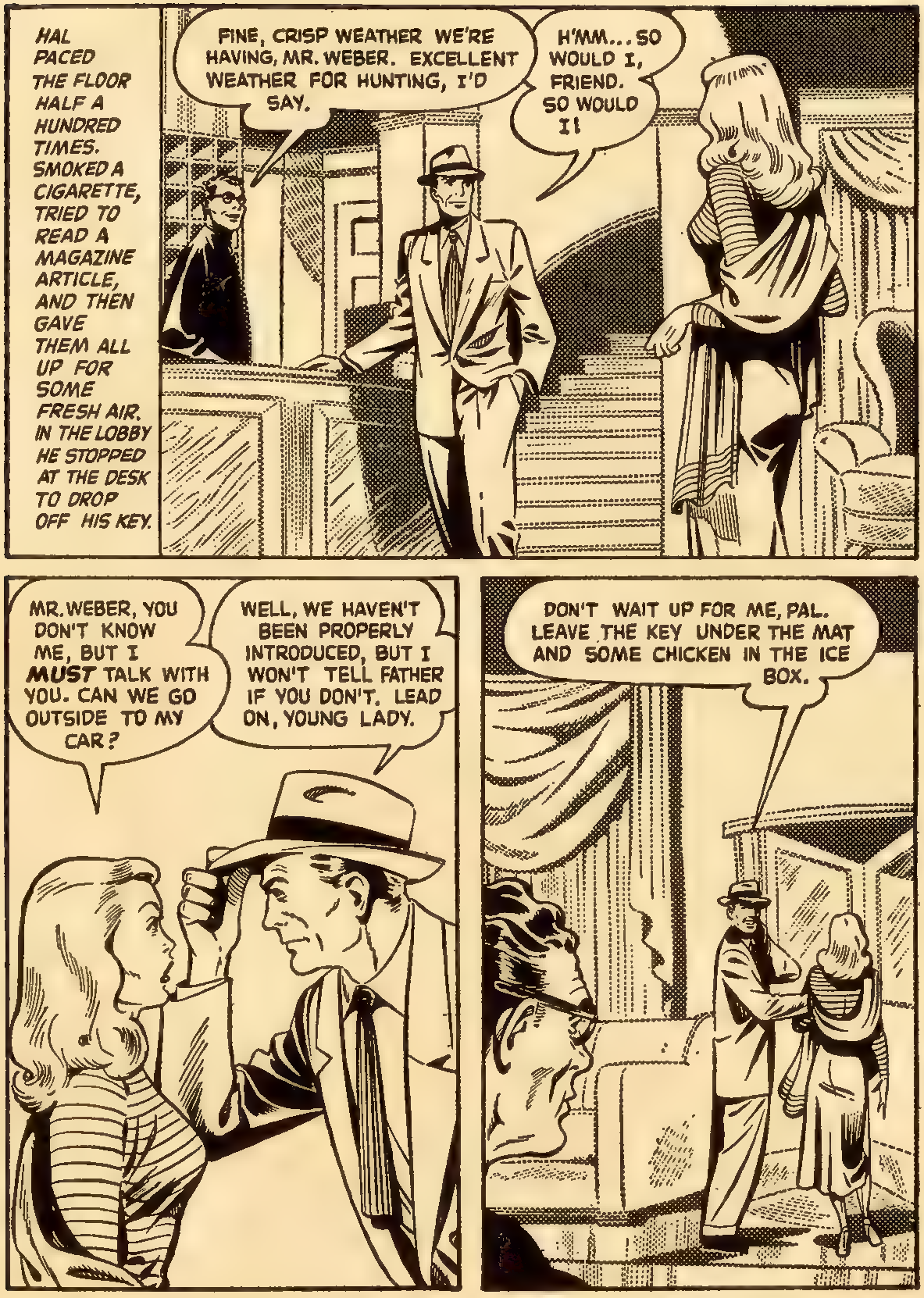
WHEN HAL WALKED INTO HIS ROOM HE WAS GREETED BY THE SCENT OF FINE CIGAR SMOKE. A HEAVY-SET MAN, IN A RACE-TRACK SUIT SAT IN THE OVERSTUFFED ARMCHAIR. HIS SHARP, CUNNING EYES SCRUTINIZED HAL AND HE SEEMED SATISFIED WITH HIS APPRAISAL TAKING THE CIGAR FROM HIS MOUTH, HE TAPPED THE LONG WHITE ASH TO THE FLOOR.
WHAT THE--- WHO ARE YOU?
EVENING, MY BOY. YOU'RE HAL WEBER. AND I'M MARCUS JEFFERS. I'VE GOT A GOOD BUSINESS PROPOSITION FOR YOU.

HAL WEBER HAD NEVER MET MARCUS JEFFERS BEFORE. BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE A NEWSPAPERMAN'S SIXTH SENSE TO RECOGNIZE THE EVIL THAT OOZED FROM THE SMALL, DAPPER POLITICIAN.
I'LL POUR SOME DRINKS WHILE YOU SPEAK YOUR PIECE
NOT PIECE, SIR, PIECES. PIECES OF EIGHT, YOU MIGHT SAY. FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS WORTH, IF THAT INTERESTS YOU.
INTERESTS ME? ASK A BEE IF HE'S INTERESTED IN HONEY.
HA-HA! I KNEW I'D COME TO THE RIGHT PARTY. ALL YOU DO IS PLAY THE CARDS RUST MASSON HAS DEALT YOU, UNTIL WE'RE READY TO SWITCH DECKS
DOUBLE-CROSS RUST? WHY YOU DIRTY...
PHAWWW!

YOU---YOU SECOND-RATE SCRIBBLER. YOU CAN BET YOU'LL HEAR MORE OF THIS!
AND *YOU* CAN GET STRAIGHT OUT OF HERE!

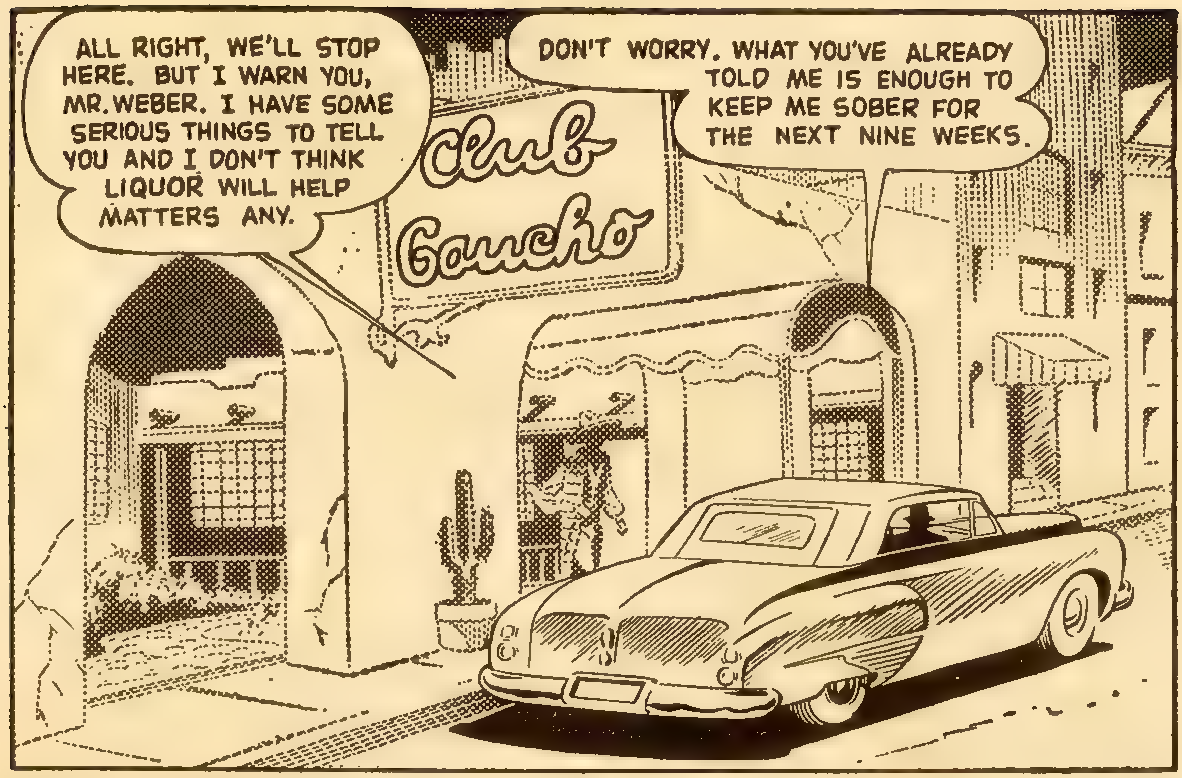
NOW WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT? WHAT KIND OF HOLE IS RUST DIGGING FOR HERSELF? BETTER GIVE HER A RING AND TELL HER ALL ABOUT THAT VULTUROUS RUNT.

IF HAL EXPECTED RUST TO SHARE HIS EXCITED ANGER, THERE WAS A MINOR SHOCK AWAITING HIM. MRS. MASSON RECEIVED THE NEWS OF JEFFERS VISIT WITH A CALM-NESS THAT RILED THE NEW EDITOR OF THE EXPRESS.
RUST, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? THIS GUY JEFFERS IS OUT TO FIX YOUR WAGON. I'M GOING OVER THERE TO TALK TO YOU.
NO, DON'T BOTHER, HAL. I'VE HAD MORE EXPERIENCE IN THE WAGON-FIXING BUSINESS THAN MARCUS HAS. LITTLE RUST CAN TAKE CARE OF HERSELF, DARLING.


HAL PACED THE FLOOR HALF A HUNDRED TIMES. SMOKED A CIGARETTE, TRIED TO READ A MAGAZINE ARTICLE, AND THEN GAVE THEM ALL UP FOR SOME FRESH AIR. IN THE LOBBY HE STOPPED AT THE DESK TO DROP OFF HIS KEY.
FINE, CRISP WEATHER WE'RE HAVING, MR. WEBER. EXCELLENT WEATHER FOR HUNTING, I'D SAY.
H'MM... SO WOULD I, FRIEND. SO WOULD I!
MR. WEBER, YOU DON'T KNOW ME, BUT I MUST TALK WITH YOU. CAN WE GO OUTSIDE TO MY CAR?
WELL, WE HAVEN'T BEEN PROPERLY INTRODUCED, BUT I WON'T TELL FATHER IF YOU DON'T. LEAD ON, YOUNG LADY.
DON'T WAIT UP FOR ME, PAL. LEAVE THE KEY UNDER THE MAT AND SOME CHICKEN IN THE ICE BOX.

YOU'RE REFRESHINGLY HONEST, MR. WEBER, SO I'LL BE THE SAME. YOU SEE, YOUR LIFE IS IN DANGER. IT ISN'T EVEN WORTH THAT THREE-CENT IOU YOU COULDN'T WRITE.
IF YOU'RE GOING TO TALK LIKE THAT, I'M GOING TO NEED A DRINK.

FOR A MOMENT HAL THOUGHT THE PRETTY, YOUNG GIRL AT HIS SIDE WAS JOKING. BUT A SIDE GLANCE AT HER PALE, FRIGHTENED FACE TOLD HIM THAT SHE HAD NEVER BEEN MORE SERIOUS. THERE, IN HER EYES LURKED THE DARK SHADOWS OF TRAGEDY.


ALL RIGHT, WE'LL STOP HERE. BUT I WARN YOU, MR. WEBER. I HAVE SOME SERIOUS THINGS TO TELL YOU AND I DON'T THINK LIQUOR WILL HELP MATTERS ANY.
DON'T WORRY. WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY TOLD ME IS ENOUGH TO KEEP ME SOBER FOR THE NEXT NINE WEEKS.
Club Gaucho

HERE. IF YOU'RE BROKE, YOU'LL NEED THIS. THEIR PRICES ARE ALL THE SAME... HIGH!
NO, THANKS. ANOTHER CHARMING LADY HAS PICKED UP THE CHECK FOR THIS EVENING'S FUN!

IF THAT'S RUST'S MONEY I WON'T LET YOU SPEND IT!
GOOD EVENING, SENOR Y SENORITA. WELCOME TO CLUB GAUCHO.

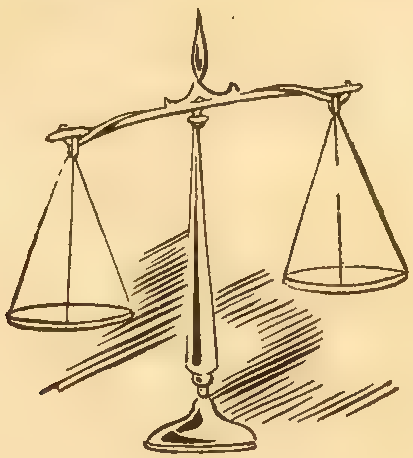
DON'T WORRY ABOUT MY MONEY. YOU CAN FEEL SURE THAT I'M GOING TO EARN IT THE HARD WAY. THAT'S THE ONLY WAY I EVER RECEIVED MONEY. YOU SEE I WASN'T LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE BORN WITH A COPPER SPOON IN MY MOUTH, MISS MASSON.
MISS MASSON! THEN YOU KNEW WHO I WAS ALL ALONG!
SENORITA

YOU DIDN'T THINK I CAME ALONG WITH YOU JUST FOR THE RIDE, DID YOU? .OH:---A COUPLE OF RYE AND SODAS, WAITER
SI, SENOR. THE ORCHESTRA COMES NOW. PERHAPS THE SENORITA WOULD CARE TO DANCE?
NOT A BAD IDEA. WILL YOU DANCE, MISS MASSON?
YES, IF YOU'LL TELL ME WHY YOU DID COME?
I'M A NEWSPAPERMAN, MISS MASSON. I ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS SEE A LOT OF THINGS AND FORGET ONLY WHEN IT'S CONVENIENT. I HAVE A PROFESSIONAL INTEREST IN EVERY-THING THAT'S WHY I'M HERE
OH, I SEE
THOUGH NO OBVIOUS CHANGE WAS DISCERNIBLE IN AUDREY'S EXPRESSION, HER SUPPLE BODY BECAME TENSE... DRAWING HER CLOSER, HAL FOUND HIMSELF MARVELING AT THE GREAT CONTRAST BETWEEN BUCK MASSON'S LOVELY DAUGHTER AND HIS BEGUILING WIDOW.

I WAS FOOLISH ENOUGH TO THINK YOU CAME BECAUSE YOU WERE IN---: WELL, LET'S FORGET THAT NOW. THE IMPORTANT THING IS, YOU'VE GOT TO STOP WORKING FOR RUST.
WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST INSTEAD? UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE?
RUST IS NOT A VIRTUOUS WOMAN, MR. WEBER. ALL HER VALUES ARE BASED ON HOW MUCH SHE CAN EXTRACT FROM A THING... AN IDEA... A PERSON. SHE MUST BE STOPPED BEFORE SHE DESTROYS THE ENTIRE TOWN.
YOU EITHER WORK WITH WOMEN LIKE RUST OR YOU LEAVE TOWN.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! I'VE SEEN RUST IN ACTION. SHE IS RUTHLESS IN HER GREED FOR POWER. NOW THAT MY FATHER'S GONE SHE HAS NOTHING TO STAND IN HER WAY--EXCEPT US, IF YOU'RE WITH ME.
YOU TALK LIKE MY OLD MAN. HE WAS A CRUSADING EDITOR IN A SMALL TOWN. THEY BURIED HIM IN A PAUPERS GRAVE.

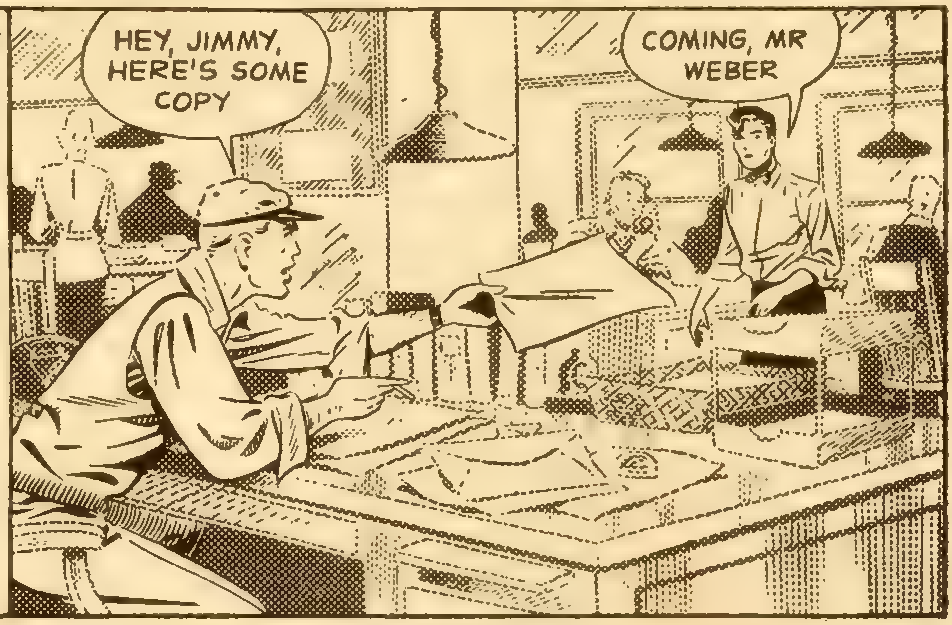
IS THAT IMPORTANT? YOUR FATHER PROBABLY DID AND SAID THE THINGS HE BELIEVED IN. ANSWER JUST ONE QUESTION FOR ME WAS YOUR FATHER A HAPPY MAN?
HE--- HE WAS THE HAPPIEST MAN I'VE EVER KNOWN. COME ON, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE
IN ONE AFTERNOON WITH RUST I FORGOT THERE WERE STILL WOMEN LIKE YOU IN THE WORLD; WOMEN WHO HAD ANY INTERESTS BEYOND THEIR OWN BEAUTY AND FORTUNE. I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND YOU, AUDREY
Club Grouch
YOU MEAN, WHY SHOULD I INTEREST MYSELF IN SUCH THINGS? I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND THAT MYSELF I GUESS I HAVE NEVER REALLY GROWN UP. I STILL BELIEVE IN WITCHES AND GOBLINS AND PRINCE CHARMINGS THAT SAVE THE SLEEPING PRINCESS
ANY PRINCE CHARMING IN PARTICULAR?

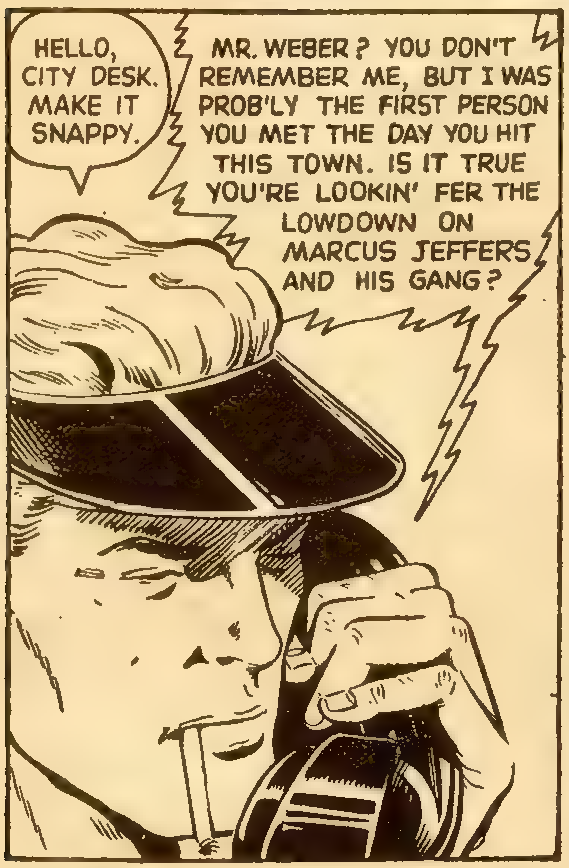
YES! YES! HAL, YOU MUST BELIEVE ME, THERE'S NEVER BEEN ANYONE . ANYONE ELSE.
MY DARLING, HOW COULD THERE BE? FOR EITHER OF US



# CHAPTER 2 CAUGHT in the WEB

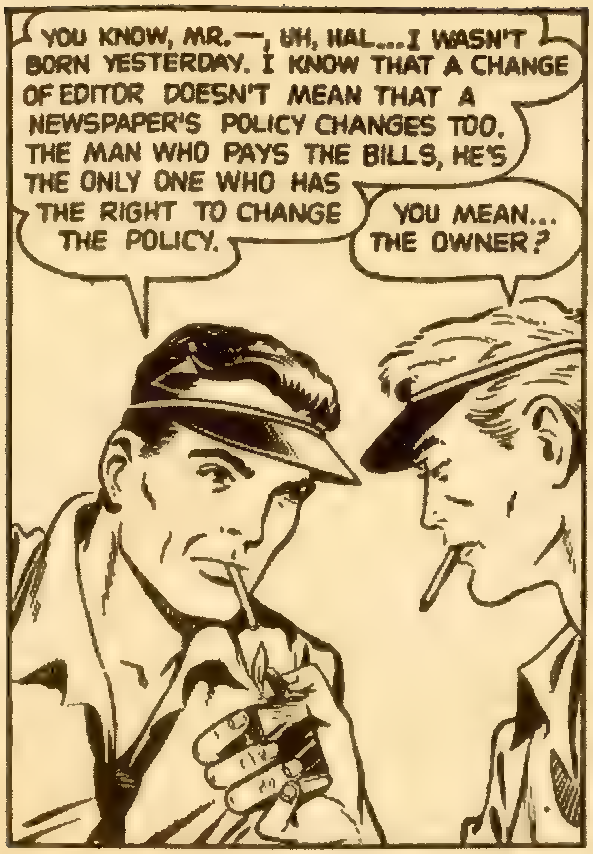
THE NEXT WEEK WAS A BUSY ONE FOR HAL WEBER. HE SAW NEITHER AUDREY NOR RUST. INSTEAD, HE PLUNGED INTO HIS WORK. RUST HAD SAID THIS WAS THE OPPOSITION PAPER, AND HAL FOUND PLENTY OF SUBJECTS FOR BLASTING EDITORALS.





HELLO, CITY DESK. MAKE IT SNAPPY.
MR. WEBER? YOU DON'T REMEMBER ME, BUT I WAS PROB'LY THE FIRST PERSON YOU MET THE DAY YOU HIT THIS TOWN. IS IT TRUE YOU'RE LOOKIN' FER THE LOWDOWN ON MARCUS JEFFERS AND HIS GANG?

THAT'S RIGHT. BUT, WHO ARE YOU? WHAT KIND OF LOWDOWN HAVE YOU GOT?
I KNOW SOMETHING, MR. WEBER. I COULD KEEP YOU SUPPLIED WITH STUFF FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS. S'POSE I DROP AROUND YOUR OFFICE TONIGHT. SAY, SIX-THIRTY?

I BETTER NOT TELL YOU MY NAME TILL I SEE YOU. SO-LONG TILL TONIGHT, MR. WEBER.
WAIT. HOW WILL I KNOW YOU'RE THE —? OKAY, TELL THE RECEPTIONIST YOU'RE A MR. SMITH. GOT THAT? SEE YOU LATER, MR. SMITH... AND THANKS!
ABOUT THIS WATER WORKS STORY. DON'T YOU WANT ME TO TAKE IT EASY ON JEFFERS? AFTER ALL, HE BOSSES THE MASSON MACHINE NOW.
FORGET THAT, JAKE. TEAR INTO HIM! THAT WATER'S POLLUTED. A DANGER TO THE COMMUNITY. GET IT?
THANKS FOR THE SMOKE. YOU KNOW, IF THE LAST EDITOR HERE EVER CAUGHT ME SITTING ON HIS DESK, I'D BE FIRED IN TWO SECONDS FLAT. BUT YOU'RE DIFFERENT MR. WEBER. YOU'RE NO STUFFED SHIRT.
SKIP THE MR. WEBER STUFF, JAKE. CALL ME HAL AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT SITTING ON MY DESK. I WOULDN'T CARE IF YOU KEPT SQUIRRELS IN MY HAT... JUST AS LONG AS YOU'RE A GOOD REPORTER.

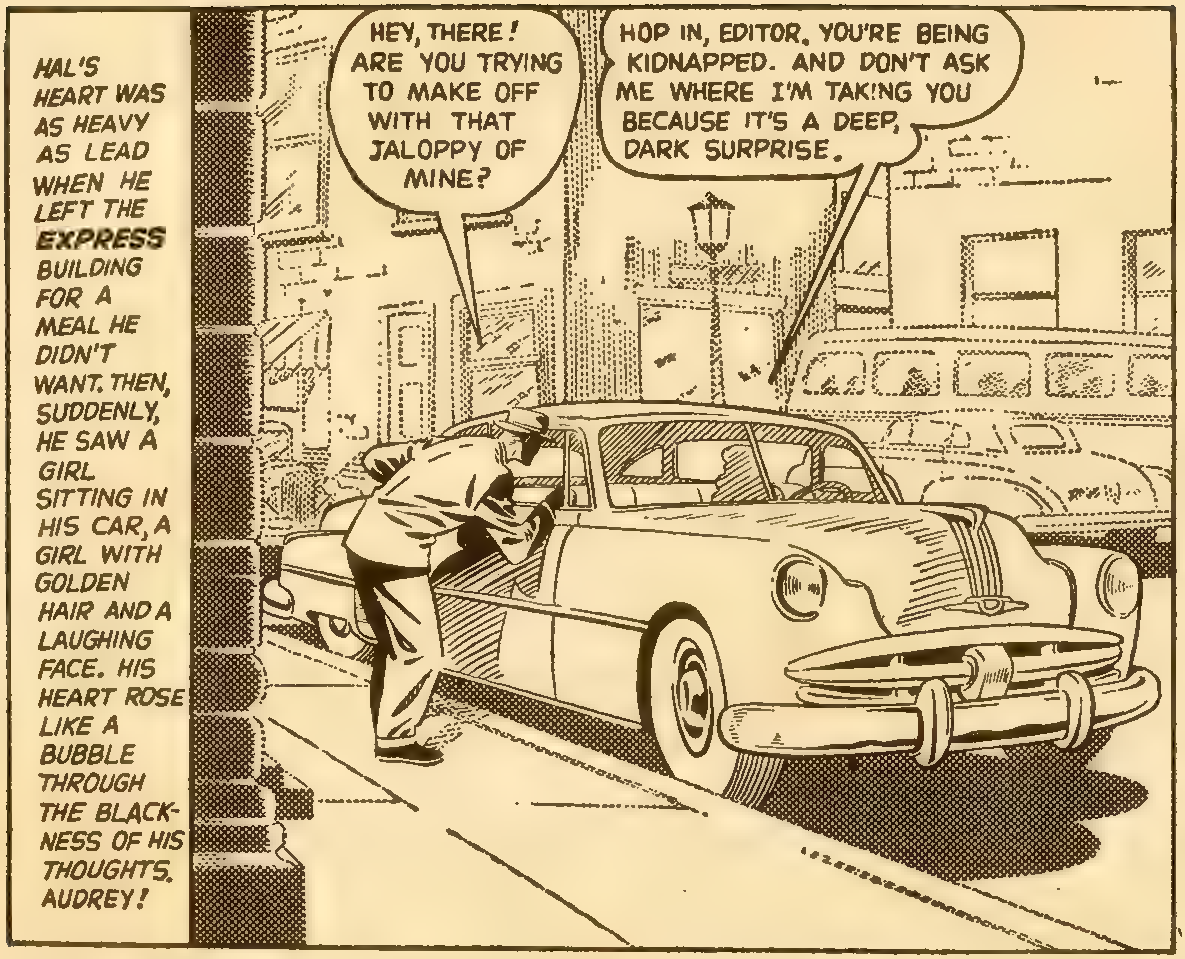

YOU KNOW, MR.—, UH, HAL...I WASN'T BORN YESTERDAY. I KNOW THAT A CHANGE OF EDITOR DOESN'T MEAN THAT A NEWSPAPER'S POLICY CHANGES TOO. THE MAN WHO PAYS THE BILLS, HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO CHANGE THE POLICY.
YOU MEAN... THE OWNER?

RIGHT... THE OWNER. THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN QUITE A MYSTERY ABOUT WHO REALLY OWNS THE EXPRESS. ALL WE KNOW IS THAT THE EDITOR IS SUPPOSED TO GET HIS ORDERS FROM SOMEONE BACK EAST.
UH...THAT'S RIGHT, JAKE. SOMEONE BACK EAST. I... CAN'T TELL YOU ANY MORE.

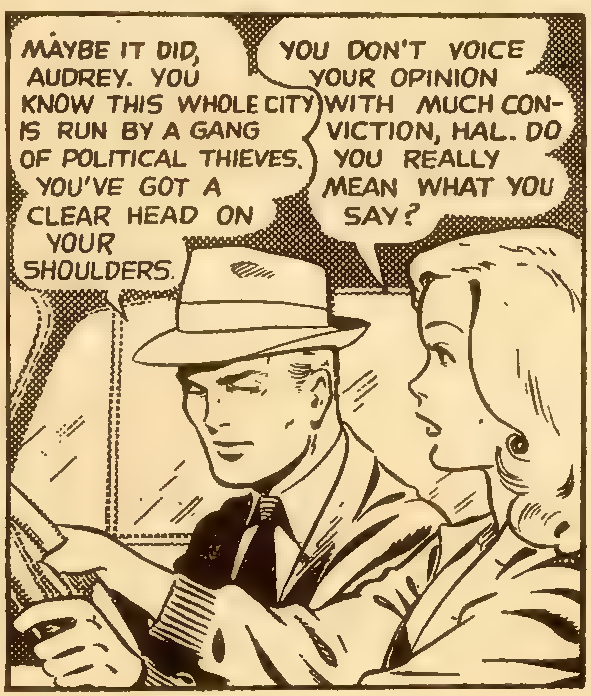
I KNOW YOU'VE GOT YOUR ORDERS, HAL, JUST LIKE THE REST OF US. BUT, WHY THE BIG COVER UP. IF THE EXPRESS IS GOING TO BE RUN THE WAY YOU WANT IT---HONEST, ALL THE FACTS-- THEN WHY NOT TELL WHO OWNS IT?
SO LONG, JAKE. I'VE GOT TO SEE NOVAK DOWN IN THE PRESS ROOM. I...I'LL SEE YOU LATER.

THERE GOES A FUNNY GUY. HE LOOKS AND ACTS AND TALKS LIKE A STRAIGHT-SHOOTER. BUT THEN, ALL OF A SUDDEN HE TURNS SOUR AND BRUSHES ME OFF. I WONDER WHY? WHAT'S HE GOT TO BE SO HUSH HUSH ABOUT? JUST NOW HE LOOKED AS IF I'D KICKED HIM IN THE STOMACH. I WONDER...
PRESS ROO

AS JAKE WALKED AWAY, A LITTLE IMP INSIDE HAL'S MIND DANCED UP AND DOWN AND MADE UGLY FACES. "HONEST EDITOR?" WHAT A FARCE! "ALL THE FACTS?" WHAT A LAUGH! IF ONLY HE COULD TELL **ALL** THE FACTS. HE WAS PAID BY RUST, CONTROLLED BY RUST...**OWNED** BY RUST! HONEST EDITOR? ABOUT AS HONEST AS A SAFE-CRACKER!
IT'S NO GOOD! I THOUGHT I COULD BURY MYSELF IN WORK, BUT I CAN'T DO IT. IF I JUST HADN'T TAKEN THIS JOB... WHAT DO I GET OUT OF IT... SOME SPENDING MONEY AND A FEW KISSES AND A FEW OF HER CHEAP, EASY EMBRACES.
HEY, MR. WEBER, IT'S PAST LUNCH-TIME! AIN'T YOU GONNA EAT?

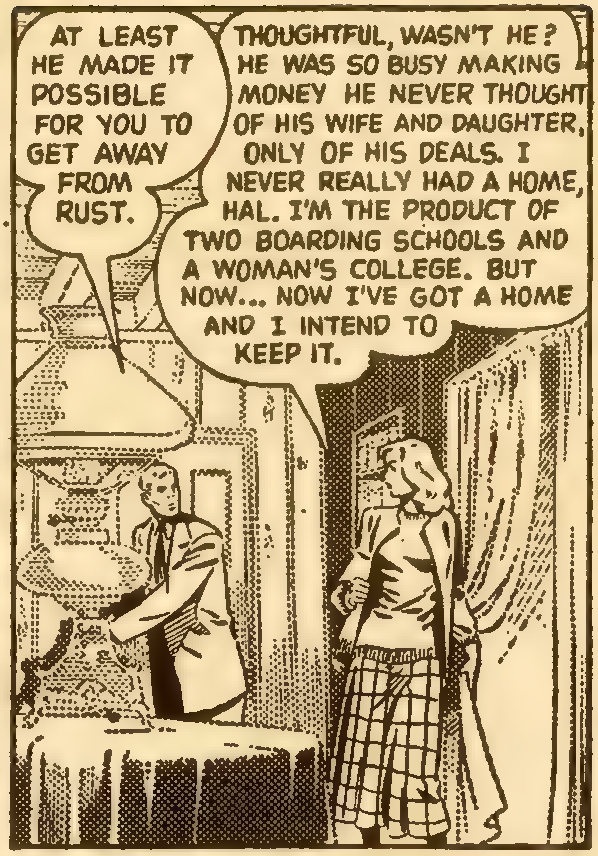

HAL'S HEART WAS AS HEAVY AS LEAD WHEN HE LEFT THE EXPRESS BUILDING FOR A MEAL HE DIDN'T WANT. THEN, SUDDENLY, HE SAW A GIRL SITTING IN HIS CAR, A GIRL WITH GOLDEN HAIR AND A LAUGHING FACE. HIS HEART ROSE LIKE A BUBBLE THROUGH THE BLACKNESS OF HIS THOUGHTS. AUDREY!
HEY, THERE! ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE OFF WITH THAT JALOPPY OF MINE?
HOP IN, EDITOR, YOU'RE BEING KIDNAPPED. AND DON'T ASK ME WHERE I'M TAKING YOU BECAUSE IT'S A DEEP, DARK SURPRISE.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, AGAIN, AUDREY. AFTER THAT NIGHT IN YOUR CAR I... WELL I'VE HOPED I'D SEE YOU AGAIN.
NONSENSE, HAL, YOU'VE BEEN MUCH TOO BUSY WITH THE EXPRESS. I'VE BEEN READING YOUR STORIES IN THE PAPER. I'VE WONDERED IF OUR TALK HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH THEM.


MAYBE IT DID, AUDREY. YOU KNOW THIS WHOLE CITY IS RUN BY A GANG OF POLITICAL THIEVES. YOU'VE GOT A CLEAR HEAD ON YOUR SHOULDERS.
YOU DON'T VOICE YOUR OPINION WITH MUCH CONVICTION, HAL. DO YOU REALLY MEAN WHAT YOU SAY?

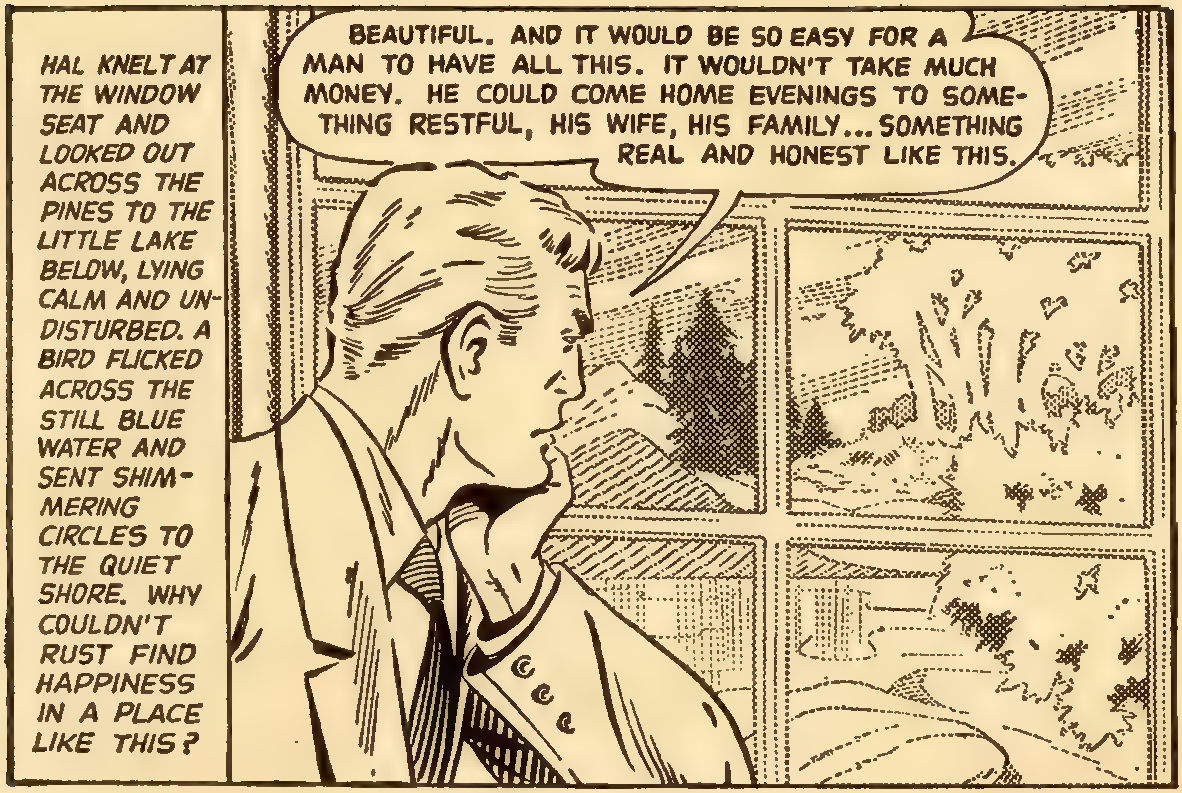
SURE I MEAN IT! I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN WHAT YOU SAID THAT NIGHT, THE THINGS YOU WANTED ME TO DO. I'VE BEEN STARTING FROM THE BOTTOM ... SLOT MACHINES, PAVING CONTRACTS, PADDED PAYROLLS.
BUT IT'S RUST WHO IS BEHIND ALL THAT, HAL. SHE IS THE ONE WE'VE GOT TO FIGHT.
SHE'S EVIL, THAT WOMAN. SHE CAME HERE WHEN MY MOTHER WAS STILL ALIVE. MOM WAS NEVER HAPPY WITH BUCK MASSON, BUT AT LEAST SHE FORGAVE HIM HIS FEW WILD OATS. THEN HE MET RUST AND HE WAS LOST. MOM KNEW THAT. SO DID RUST.
YOU MEAN, RUST DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR MOTHER'S DEATH?
SHE KILLED MOM AS SURELY AS IF SHE'D SHOT HER. IT WAS KNOWING HOW BUCK FELT ABOUT RUST THAT MADE MOM WANT TO GIVE UP. SHE JUST PINED AWAY... DRIED UP... DIED. THAT'S WHY I LEFT HOME, STAYED AWAY AT SCHOOL. THAT'S WHY I --- BUT ENOUGH OF THAT. HERE'S MY COTTAGE, HAL ISN'T IT NICE?
AUDREY, IT'S... IT'S MAGNIFICENT!

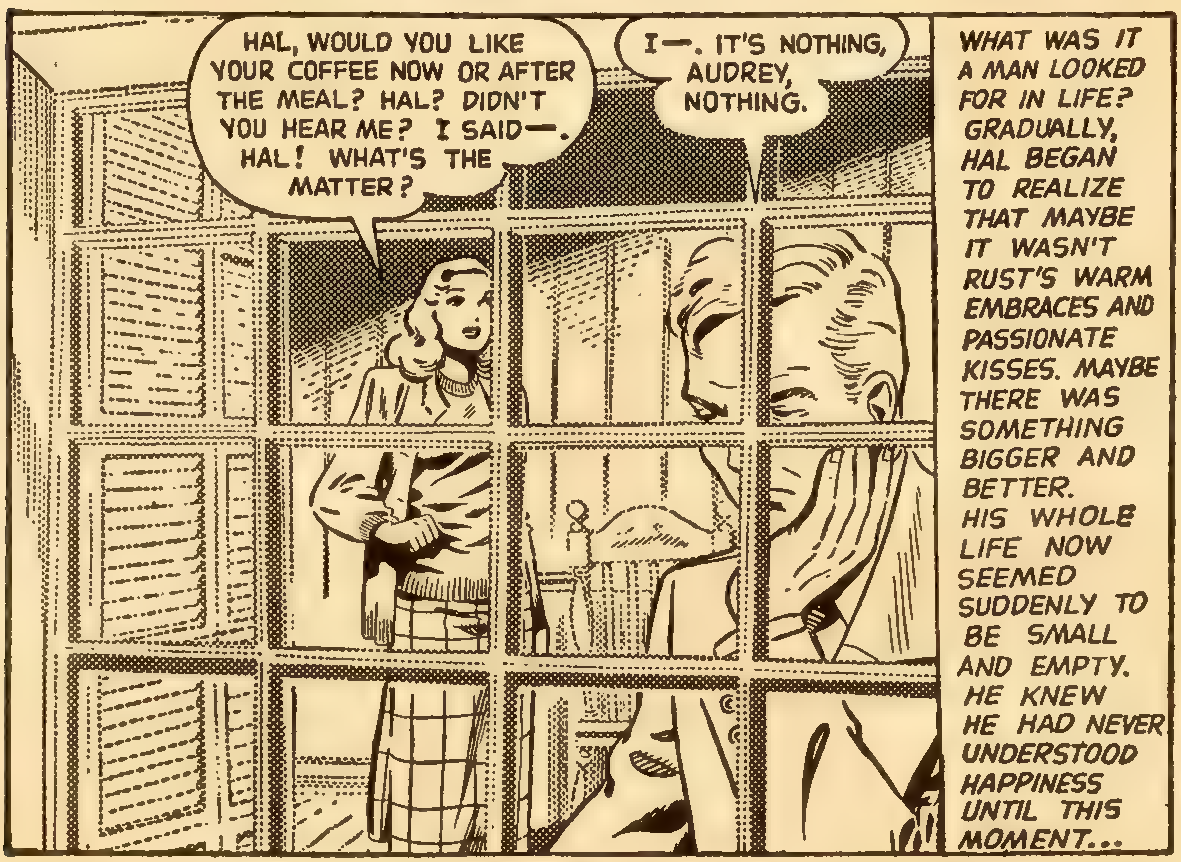
I HAD NO IDEA THERE WERE PLACES LIKE THIS IN COPPER CITY!
MY FATHER HAD A LOT ON HIS CONSCIENCE WHEN HE LEFT ME THIS COTTAGE IN HIS WILL. IT'S PROBABLY THE ONLY THING I HAVE TO THANK HIM FOR.


AT LEAST HE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO GET AWAY FROM RUST.
THOUGHTFUL, WASN'T HE? HE WAS SO BUSY MAKING MONEY HE NEVER THOUGHT OF HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER, ONLY OF HIS DEALS. I NEVER REALLY HAD A HOME, HAL. I'M THE PRODUCT OF TWO BOARDING SCHOOLS AND A WOMAN'S COLLEGE. BUT NOW... NOW I'VE GOT A HOME AND I INTEND TO KEEP IT.

AS HAL WALKED INTO THE COMFORTABLE LIVING ROOM AND SAW THE TABLE SET WITH TWO PLACES, HE REALIZED THAT AUDREY HAD DONE ALL THIS FOR HIM. THE LUNCHEON, THE SOFT WHITE LINEN, AND A FIRE SENDING OUT A WARM GLOW FROM THE FIRE-PLACE.

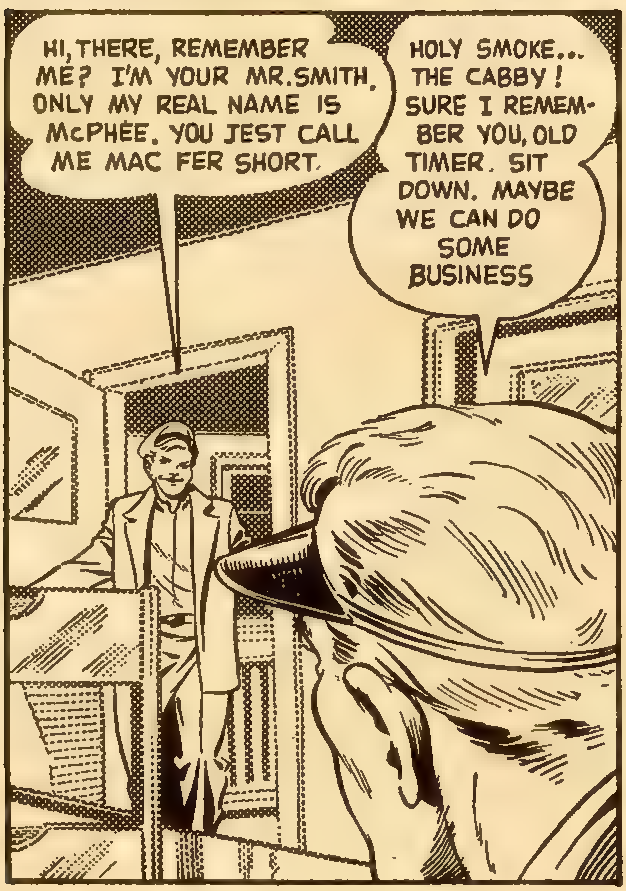
WE'LL BE READY TO EAT IN A MOMENT, HAL. I HOPE YOU LIKE OLD-FASHIONED IRISH STEW. IT'S JUST ABOUT THE ONLY THING I KNOW HOW TO MAKE WELL.
LOVE IT. FUNNY THING... FIFTEEN MINUTES AGO I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE EATING AT ALL. BUT NOW I'VE GOT AN APPETITE LIKE A GRIZZLY BEAR.


HAL KNELT AT THE WINDOW SEAT AND LOOKED OUT ACROSS THE PINES TO THE LITTLE LAKE BELOW, LYING CALM AND UNDISTURBED. A BIRD FLICKED ACROSS THE STILL BLUE WATER AND SENT SHIMMERING CIRCLES TO THE QUIET SHORE. WHY COULDN'T RUST FIND HAPPINESS IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?
BEAUTIFUL. AND IT WOULD BE SO EASY FOR A MAN TO HAVE ALL THIS. IT WOULDN'T TAKE MUCH MONEY. HE COULD COME HOME EVENINGS TO SOMETHING RESTFUL, HIS WIFE, HIS FAMILY... SOMETHING REAL AND HONEST LIKE THIS.

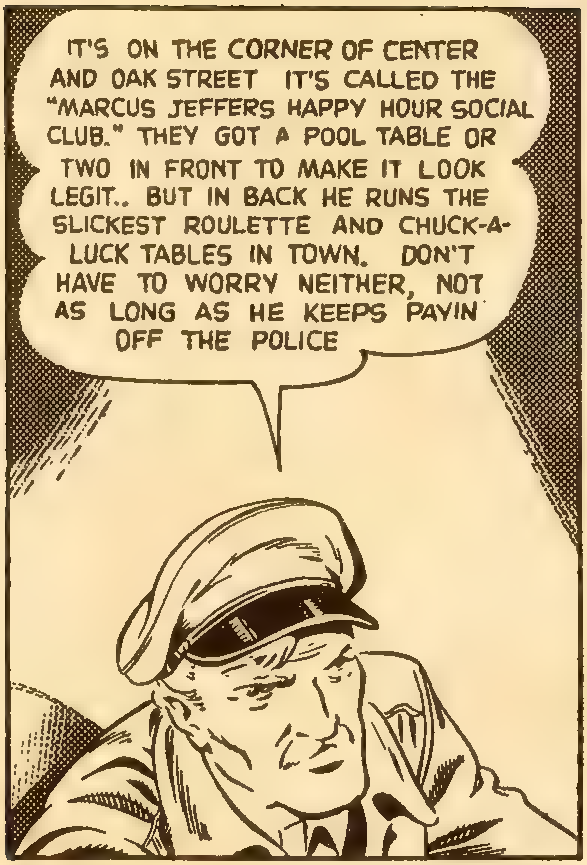

HAL, WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR COFFEE NOW OR AFTER THE MEAL? HAL? DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? I SAID—. HAL! WHAT'S THE MATTER?
I—. IT'S NOTHING, AUDREY, NOTHING.
WHAT WAS IT A MAN LOOKED FOR IN LIFE? GRADUALLY, HAL BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT MAYBE IT WASN'T RUST'S WARM EMBRACES AND PASSIONATE KISSES. MAYBE THERE WAS SOMETHING BIGGER AND BETTER. HIS WHOLE LIFE NOW SEEMED SUDDENLY TO BE SMALL AND EMPTY. HE KNEW HE HAD NEVER UNDERSTOOD HAPPINESS UNTIL THIS MOMENT...

AUDREY, I'D GIVE ANYTHING TO BE ABLE TO LIVE A LIFE LIKE THIS -- CLOSE TO EVERYTHING THAT'S REAL— CLOSE TO YOU!
I'VE BEEN WISHING YOU'D SAY THAT, HAL. OUT HERE IN THE COUNTRY YOU GET A NEW PERSPECTIVE. YOU FORGET EVERYTHING THAT'S DISMAL AND CROOKED IN THE CITY. YOU'VE GOT TO, HAL!
I WISH I COULD GIVE IT UP, AUDREY, BUT I CAN'T... I'M IN IT TOO DEEPLY. IF ONLY I HADN'T LOST ALL MY ILLUSIONS! BUT I CAN'T... I WON'T CONTAMINATE YOUR MIND WITH MY CYNICISM!
NONSENSE. YOU'RE TALKING LIKE A CHILD, HAL. YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR WHOLE LIFE IF YOU REALLY WANT TO.
I WISH I COULD, AUDREY. I'D GIVE ANYTHING FOR THE FIRE AND ZEAL AND ZEST MY FATHER HAD.
HUSH, DARLING. IT'S ALL RIGHT. EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.
AUDREY'S WARM STRENGTH COURSED THROUGH HAL LIKE A FIRE, REVIVING THE HIGH IDEALS AND HONEST CONVICTIONS THAT ONCE HAD BEEN OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. IF ONLY HE COULD RECLAIM THEM, FIGHT FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PROVE HIMSELF WORTHY TO REBUILD HIS LIFE WITH THIS GIRL, WHOSE SOFT VOICE AND ASSURING CARESSES SHUT OUT ALL VICIOUS UGLINESS, MAKING HIM FORGET EVERYTHING SORDID — YES, EVEN RUST!

BUT THAT EVENING, AS ALWAYS, HE WAS BACK IN THE HUMDRUM WORLD AGAIN. YET, SOMEHOW, AS HE WORKED LATE IN THE CITY ROOM IT WAS A DIFFERENT WORLD, DIFFERENT FOR HER LAUGHTER, AND THE PROMISE OF TOMORROW THAT SHONE IN HER CLEAR HONEST EYES.
GOOD NIGHT, MR. WEBER. I'M LEAVING NOW. OH, SAY, THERE'S A MAN OUTSIDE WAITING TO SEE YOU. HE SAYS HE'S A MR SMITH.
SMITH? FINE! SEND HIM RIGHT IN.


HI, THERE, REMEMBER ME? I'M YOUR MR. SMITH, ONLY MY REAL NAME IS McPHEE. YOU JEST CALL ME MAC FER SHORT.
HOLY SMOKE... THE CABBY! SURE I REMEMBER YOU, OLD TIMER. SIT DOWN. MAYBE WE CAN DO SOME BUSINESS

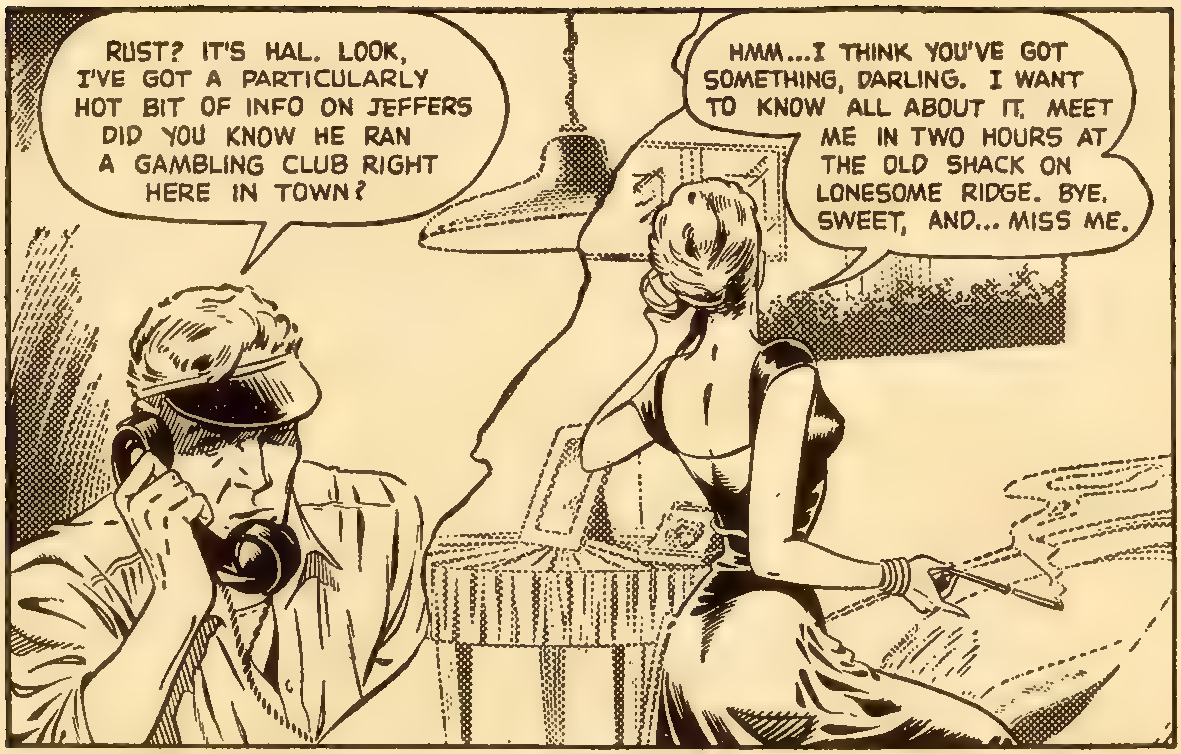
NO THANKS. I'LL STICK TO MY CHEWING. NOW, ABOUT THIS HERE JEFFERS SKUNK. I KNOW EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT HIM. BUT MEBBE YOU'D LIKE TO START WITH THAT GAMBLING DEN HE RUNS OVER ON CENTER STREET.
GAMBLING, EH? WHAT'S THE ADDRESS?


IT'S ON THE CORNER OF CENTER AND OAK STREET IT'S CALLED THE "MARCUS JEFFERS HAPPY HOUR SOCIAL CLUB." THEY GOT A POOL TABLE OR TWO IN FRONT TO MAKE IT LOOK LEGIT.. BUT IN BACK HE RUNS THE SLICKEST ROULETTE AND CHUCK-A-LUCK TABLES IN TOWN. DON'T HAVE TO WORRY NEITHER, NOT AS LONG AS HE KEEPS PAYIN OFF THE POLICE

SAY, SONNY. AIN'T THIS HERE OFFICE GOT NO GARBOON? MIGHTY THOUGHTLESS, I MUST SAY. ABOUT THE CLUB, THERE AIN'T MUCH MORE TO TELL. JEFFERS HAS RUN IT FER YEARS, JEST LIKE HE'S RUN THE FIRST WARD WHICH IS WHERE HIS CLUB IS

I GUESS THAT'S ENOUGH FOR A START. COME BACK SOON, OLD TIMER, I CAN USE ALL THE INFORMATION YOU'VE GOT. AND, MEANWHILE, HERE'S A SMALL TOKEN OF MY GRATITUDE.
KEEP YER MONEY, BUB. I GET MY FUN FROM HELPING WHIP THAT MASSON GANG. SO LONG..AND GIT SOME GARBOONS IN HERE.

I'M WHIPPING THE MASSON GANG, ALL RIGHT...THAT PART OF IT RUST WANTS WHIPPED. IF THAT OLD FELLOW REALLY KNEW...! WELL, ANYWAY, HERE GOES NOTHING.


RUST? IT'S HAL. LOOK, I'VE GOT A PARTICULARLY HOT BIT OF INFO ON JEFFERS DID YOU KNOW HE RAN A GAMBLING CLUB RIGHT HERE IN TOWN?
HMM...I THINK YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING, DARLING. I WANT TO KNOW ALL ABOUT IT. MEET ME IN TWO HOURS AT THE OLD SHACK ON LONESOME RIDGE. BYE. SWEET, AND... MISS ME.

A RENDEZVOUS WITH RUST. WELL... ALL IN A DAY'S WORK. BUT THIS TIME IT'LL BE STRICTLY WORK, NOT PLAY! NO MATTER WHAT, I'M GOING TO KEEP THIS ALL BUSINESS. THERE'S THE SHACK NOW.

REACH, BUSTER. IF YOU'RE HAL WEBER, YOU CAN GO IN. BUT IF YOU'RE NOT, YOU STAY OUT.
OKAY, FUNNY MAN, I'M WEBER. BUT I DIDN'T KNOW RUST HAD A COMIC GORILLA ON HER PAYROLL

HAL SWUNG THE BATTERED DOOR OF THE MINING SHACK OPEN, STEPPED INSIDE... AND THERE WAS RUST, LOOKING AS SEDUCTIVE AS EVER. HE HAD BEEN TELLING HIMSELF THAT THIS MEETING WAS TO BE BUSINESS — ALL BUSINESS.
H-HELLO, RUST. I... I...
CLOSE THE DOOR, PET. I WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THIS HOT SCOOP OF YOURS, FIRST.
I...WELL, THE GAMBLING JOINT'S AT CENTER AND OAK. ROULETTE, CHUCK-A-LUCK, EVERYTHING. I THOUGHT WE COULD SLIP A PHOTOGRAPHER IN THERE, GET PICTURES AND BREAK THE STORY WIDE OPEN.
WELL, REALLY, DARLING! AREN'T YOU GOING TO KISS ME?
OH, RUST, I. .I.. DON'T THINK.
I WAS WONDERING, PRECIOUS, JUST HOW LONG YOU'D REMAIN SO GRIM AND BUSINESSLIKE.

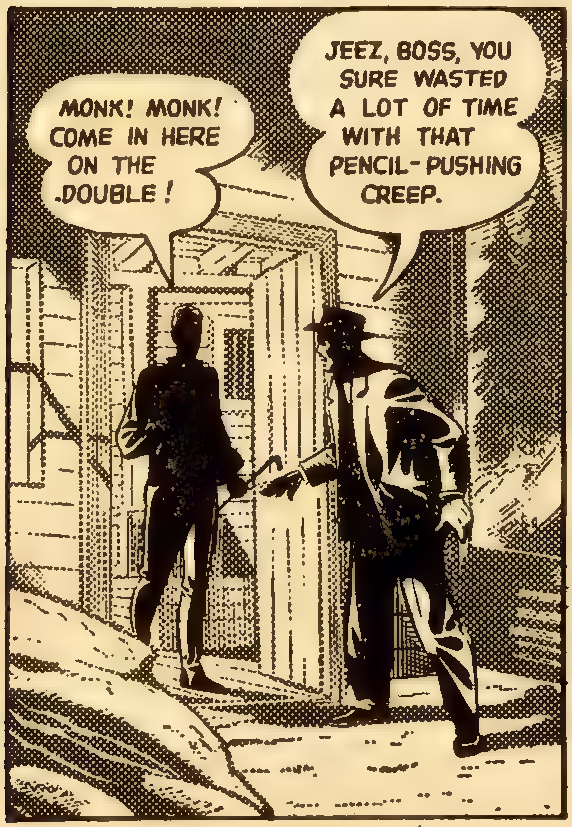
BUT THIS IS IMPORTANT, RUST. IF JEFFERS DIDN'T HAVE POLICE PROTECTION, I THINK WE MIGHT EVEN GET HIS CLUB RAIDED!
WE CAN, DARLING. I THINK I CAN MAKE OUR ILLUSTRIOUS POLICE CHIEF SEE THE LIGHT. I'LL ARRANGE THE RAID FOR THE NIGHT AFTER YOU BREAK THE STORY.

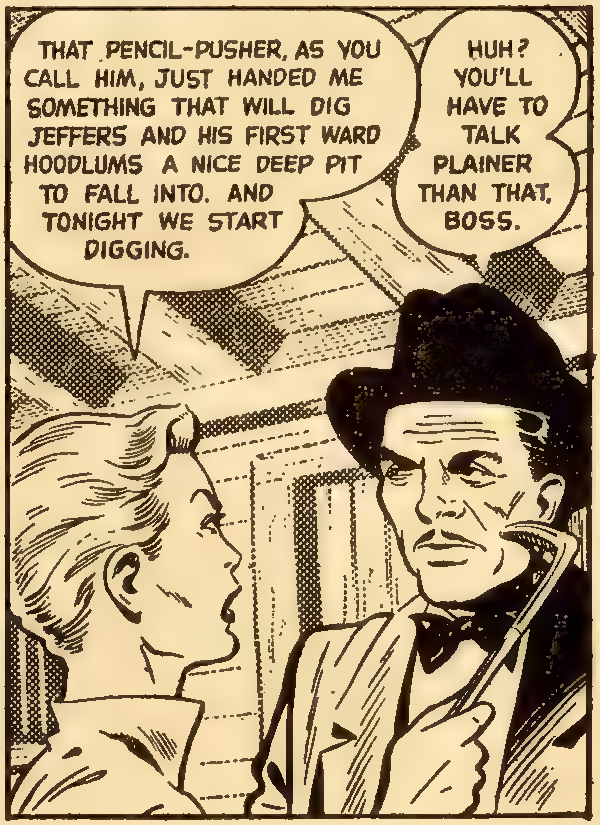
YOU WILL? WONDERFUL! THIS WILL SEND THE EXPRESS' REPUTATION SKY-HIGH.
THE CHIEF AND I ARE... OLD FRIENDS. MEANWHILE, GET THOSE PHOTOS TOMORROW NIGHT. MARCUS WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT HIT HIM.

I LEAVE EVERYTHING IN YOUR CAPABLE HANDS, MY DARLING. I ALWAYS LEAVE EVERYTHING IN YOUR HANDS... EVEN MYSELF.
RUST...WHY IS IT THAT WHEN I'M WITH YOU I CAN'T THINK... CAN'T SEE. I'M LIKE A BLIND MAN. AND...I LIKE IT!
DYNAMITE
DYNAMITE

LEAVE NOW, HAL. OH, AND BY THE WAY, I WANT YOU TO START AN ATHLETIC CLUB FOR THE EXPRESS COPY AND DELIVERY BOYS. PAY ALL THE BILLS, MAKE IT BIG... CLUBHOUSE, EQUIPMENT, MOVIES, EVERYTHING.
ATHLETIC CLUB? BUT WHY, RUST?

PRESTIGE, PET. YOU'LL BE KNOWN AS A CIVIC-MINDED CITIZEN. AND YOU'LL BE MUCH MORE VALUABLE TO ME WITH THAT KIND OF REPUTATION. SPEND ALL YOU NEED TO GIVE THE LITTLE MORONS WHAT THEY WANT. AND... I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW NIGHT. GOOD NIGHT, MY VERY OWN.
GOOD NIGHT? BUT... OKAY, RUST, OKAY, GOOD NIGHT.

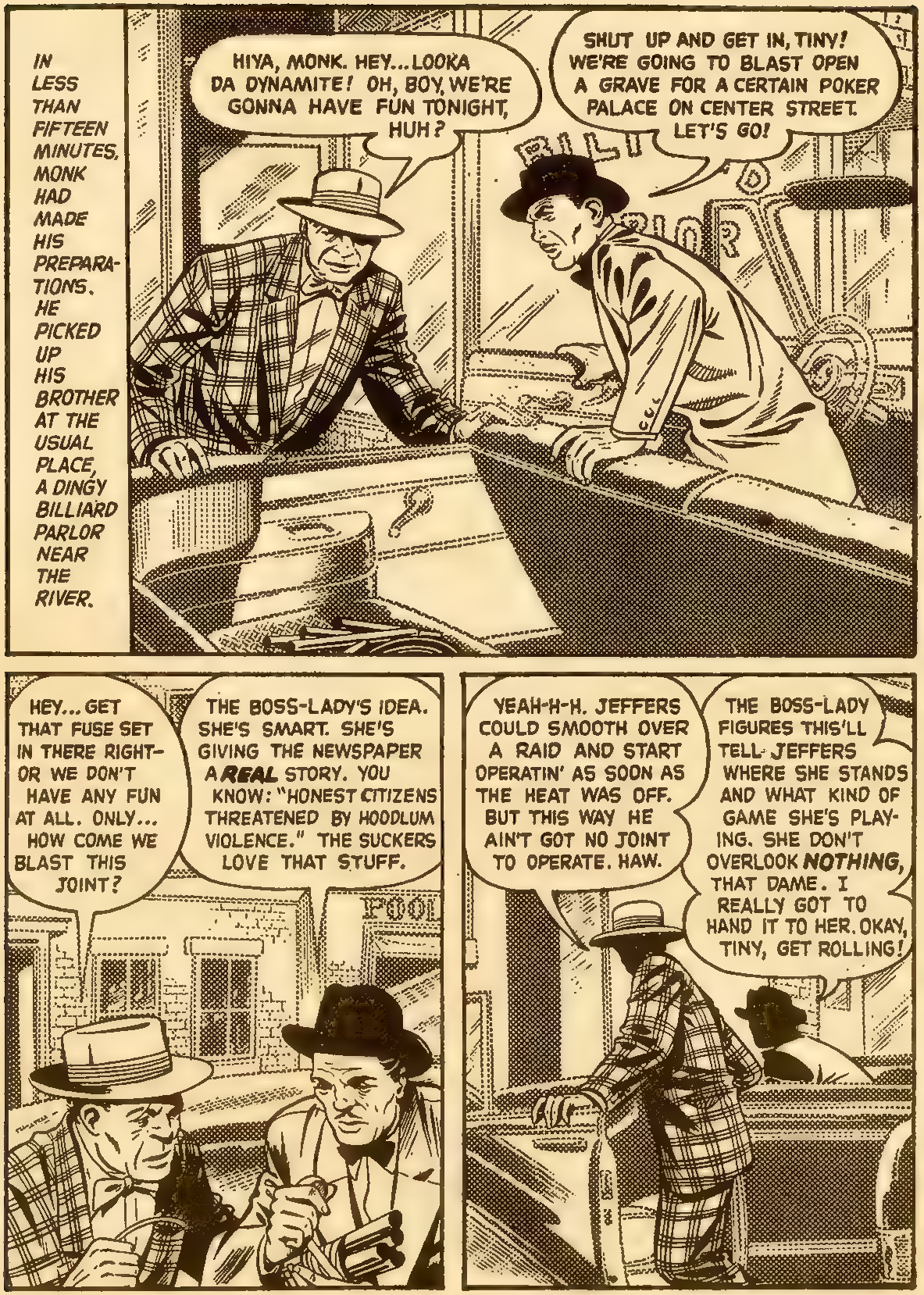

MONK! MONK! COME IN HERE ON THE DOUBLE!
JEEZ, BOSS, YOU SURE WASTED A LOT OF TIME WITH THAT PENCIL-PUSHING CREEP.


THAT PENCIL-PUSHER, AS YOU CALL HIM, JUST HANDED ME SOMETHING THAT WILL DIG JEFFERS AND HIS FIRST WARD HOODLUMS A NICE DEEP PIT TO FALL INTO. AND TONIGHT WE START DIGGING.
HUH? YOU'LL HAVE TO TALK PLAINER THAN THAT, BOSS.

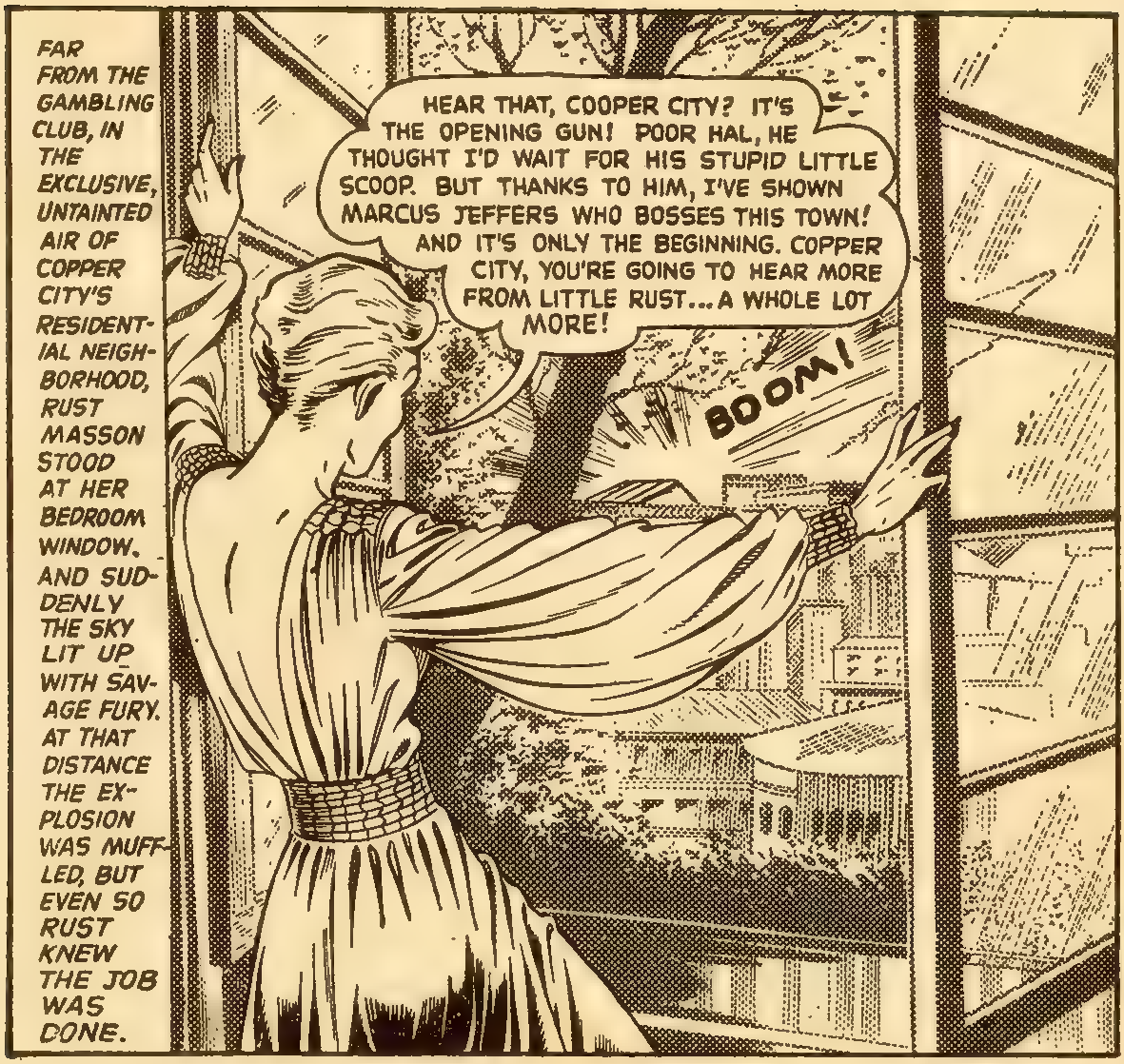
I'LL MAKE IT SIMPLE ENOUGH EVEN FOR YOU, MONK. I KNEW JEFFERS OWNED MOST OF THE VICE IN TOWN, BUT BUCK NEVER TOLD ME WHERE THE LOCATIONS WERE, BEFORE HE DIED. IF I SENT ONE OF YOU THUGS AROUND TO FIND OUT, JEFFERS WOULD TUMBLE TO IT IMMEDIATELY. BUT MY PENCIL-PUSHING FRIEND STUMBLED INTO IT WITH HIS EYES SHUT. THERE'S A GAMBLING JOINT AT CENTER AND OAK. BEFORE THE NIGHT'S OVER...I DON'T WANT IT TO BE THERE!
YOU MEAN...?

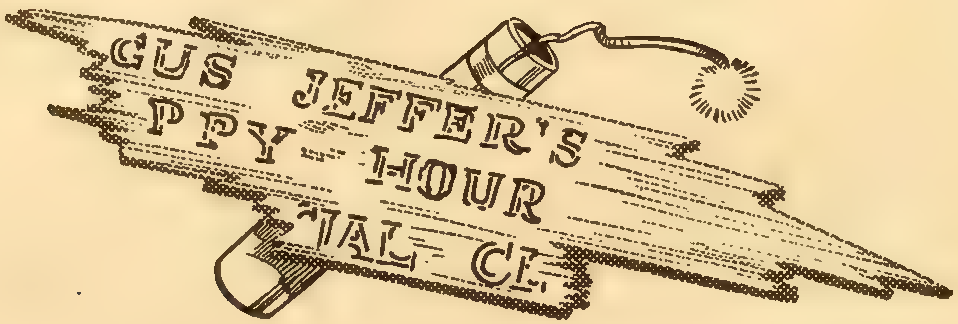
EXACTLY! NOW LISTEN: I WANT AS FEW PEOPLE TO KNOW THIS AS POSSIBLE. GET THAT STUPID BROTHER OF YOURS, THE BIG ONE. LOCATE A FAST, OPEN CAR. THEN TAKE ENOUGH OF THIS DYNAMITE TO MAKE A COUPLE OF GOOD-SIZED BOMBS. BY THE WAY... HOW'S YOUR PITCHING ARM? ACCURATE?

I COULD HIT A FLEA AT FIFTY YARDS, BOSS-LADY. I'M VALUABLE, KNOW IT? YOU SHOULD TREAT ME NICER. F'R INSTANCE, LIKE YOU TREATED THAT PENCIL-PUSHER TONIGHT.
DON'T GET ANY FUNNY IDEAS, MUSCLE-BOY. GRAB SOME STICKS OF DYNAMITE AND FOLLOW ME. I'LL EXPLAIN AS WE GO. JEFFERS IS ABOUT TO GET SOME VERY LOADED DICE IN HIS CHUCK-A-LUCK GAME.


IN LESS THAN FIFTEEN MINUTES, MONK HAD MADE HIS PREPARATIONS. HE PICKED UP HIS BROTHER AT THE USUAL PLACE, A DINGY BILLIARD PARLOR NEAR THE RIVER.
HIYA, MONK. HEY... LOOKA DA DYNAMITE! OH, BOY, WE'RE GONNA HAVE FUN TONIGHT, HUH?
SHUT UP AND GET IN, TINY! WE'RE GOING TO BLAST OPEN A GRAVE FOR A CERTAIN POKER PALACE ON CENTER STREET. LET'S GO!
HEY... GET THAT FUSE SET IN THERE RIGHT— OR WE DON'T HAVE ANY FUN AT ALL. ONLY... HOW COME WE BLAST THIS JOINT?
THE BOSS-LADY'S IDEA. SHE'S SMART. SHE'S GIVING THE NEWSPAPER A REAL STORY. YOU KNOW: "HONEST CITIZENS THREATENED BY HOODLUM VIOLENCE." THE SUCKERS LOVE THAT STUFF.
YEAH-H-H. JEFFERS COULD SMOOTH OVER A RAID AND START OPERATIN' AS SOON AS THE HEAT WAS OFF. BUT THIS WAY HE AIN'T GOT NO JOINT TO OPERATE. HAW.
THE BOSS-LADY FIGURES THIS'LL TELL JEFFERS WHERE SHE STANDS AND WHAT KIND OF GAME SHE'S PLAYING. SHE DON'T OVERLOOK NOTHING, THAT DAME. I REALLY GOT TO HAND IT TO HER. OKAY, TINY, GET ROLLING!

DRIVE SLOWER, TINY. THERE! THERE'S A NUMBER JEFFERS DIDN'T EXPECT TO COME UP ON THE ROULETTE WHEEL. RIGHT THROUGH THE WINDOW!
HAW! FOR SOME O' THEM SUCKERS INSIDE, THIS'LL BE DOUBLE-ZERO!
THERE! STRAIGHT THROUGH THE DOOR AND INTO THE LOBBY. I BET THE BOSS-LADY GIVES ME A BONUS FOR TONIGHT'S PITCHING.
WOULD I LOVE TO SEE THE LOOK ON JEFFER'S PUSS! ONLY IT AIN'T GONNA BE THERE LONG. THE FACE, I MEAN, HAW!
HEY... THAT KIDS GOIN' RIGHT PAST THE JOINT. THAT AIN'T A VERY SMART WAY FOR HIM TO PEDDLE PAPERS, IS IT, MONK? HAW!
SHUT UP, STUPID! STEP ON THE GAS! LET'S GET THIS HEAP OUT OF HERE FAST BEFORE...
COPPER CITY EXPRESS

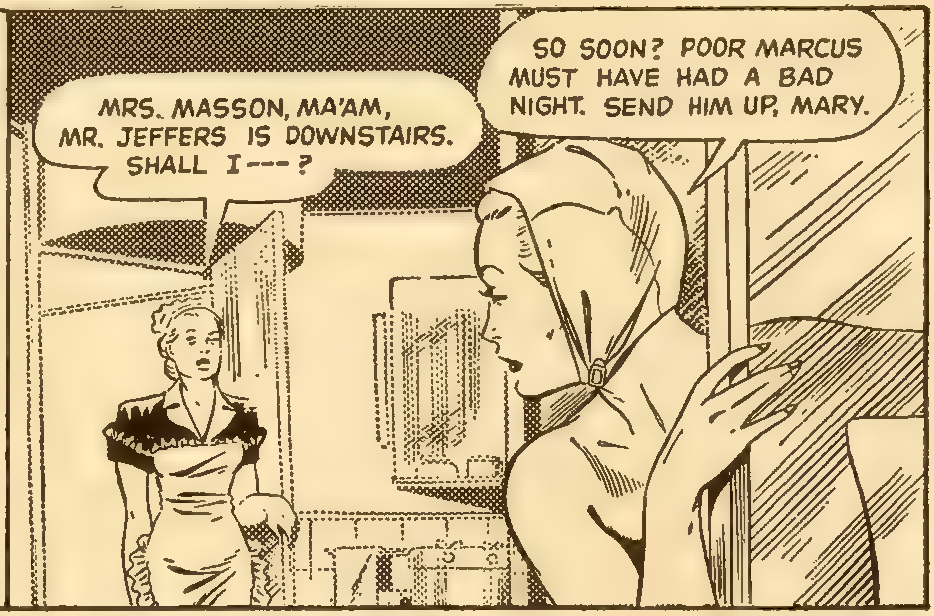

FAR FROM THE GAMBLING CLUB, IN THE EXCLUSIVE, UNTAINTED AIR OF COPPER CITY'S RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD, RUST MASSON STOOD AT HER BEDROOM WINDOW. AND SUDDENLY THE SKY LIT UP WITH SAVAGE FURY. AT THAT DISTANCE THE EXPLOSION WAS MUFFLED, BUT EVEN SO RUST KNEW THE JOB WAS DONE.
HEAR THAT, COOPER CITY? IT'S THE OPENING GUN! POOR HAL, HE THOUGHT I'D WAIT FOR HIS STUPID LITTLE SCOOP. BUT THANKS TO HIM, I'VE SHOWN MARCUS JEFFERS WHO BOSSES THIS TOWN! AND IT'S ONLY THE BEGINNING. COPPER CITY, YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR MORE FROM LITTLE RUST... A WHOLE LOT MORE!
BOOM!


GUS JEFFERS
PPY HOUR
TAL CI

# DEADLY FEMALE

## CHAPTER 3

AS DAWN BROKE OVER COPPER CITY THE NEXT MORNING, RUST MASSON, OBLIVIOUS TO THE FATE OF MANY PAIN-RACKED VICTIMS IN THE MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL, AWOKE WITH A SMILE OF SATISFACTION. IT HAD BEEN A GOOD NIGHT... A RESTFUL NIGHT... AND THE DAY WAS FULL OF PROMISE.



RUST! GOOD LORD, WOMAN, DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH LAST NIGHT'S LITTLE INCIDENT WILL COST ME?
INCIDENT, MARCUS? WHAT INCIDENT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

DON'T PLAY INNOCENT WITH ME, RUST! YOU HAD ME FOOLED, I ADMIT THAT. BUT YOUR THUGS BOMBED MY CLUB. I KNOW THAT, TOO!
WONDERFUL, MARCUS. THEN WE NEEDN'T WASTE TIME SPARRING WITH EACH OTHER. NOW YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'M AFTER.

I OWN THIS TOWN, MARCUS. I OWN THE MINES, THE BANKS, EVERYTHING. AND I OWN THE POLITICAL MACHINE, TOO. PEOPLE HAVE BEEN FOOLING THEMSELVES LONG ENOUGH, YOU INCLUDED. I BOSS THE MACHINE, I ALWAYS WILL. YOU'RE THROUGH, MARCUS... ALL WASHED UP!
YOU BOSS THE MACHINE? DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH! CAN YOU BOSS BIG JIM GAULT DOWNSTATE? OR HONEST SAM LACEY IN GREENSVILLE? HOW CAN YOU BOSS THE MACHINE WHEN NINE-TENTHS OF THE LEADERS NEVER HEARD OF YOU?
YOU MAY HAVE BEEN BUCK'S RIGHT-HAND MAN, MARCUS, BUT I WAS HIS WIFE. HE LEFT ME A LITTLE EXTRA DYNAMITE... THIS PACKET OF LETTERS, AFFIDAVITS, POLICE RECORDS. THEY IMPLICATE THE MASSON MACHINE BIGWIGS IN EVERYTHING FROM PETTY LARCENY TO PREMEDITATED MURDER! THAT'S HOW I BOSS THE MACHINE. LEARN A LESSON IN POLITICS, MARCUS. YOU CAN'T FIGHT ME... SO JOIN ME!
YOU'RE A SMART APPLE, RUST. BE SURE YOU DON'T OUTSMART YOURSELF!

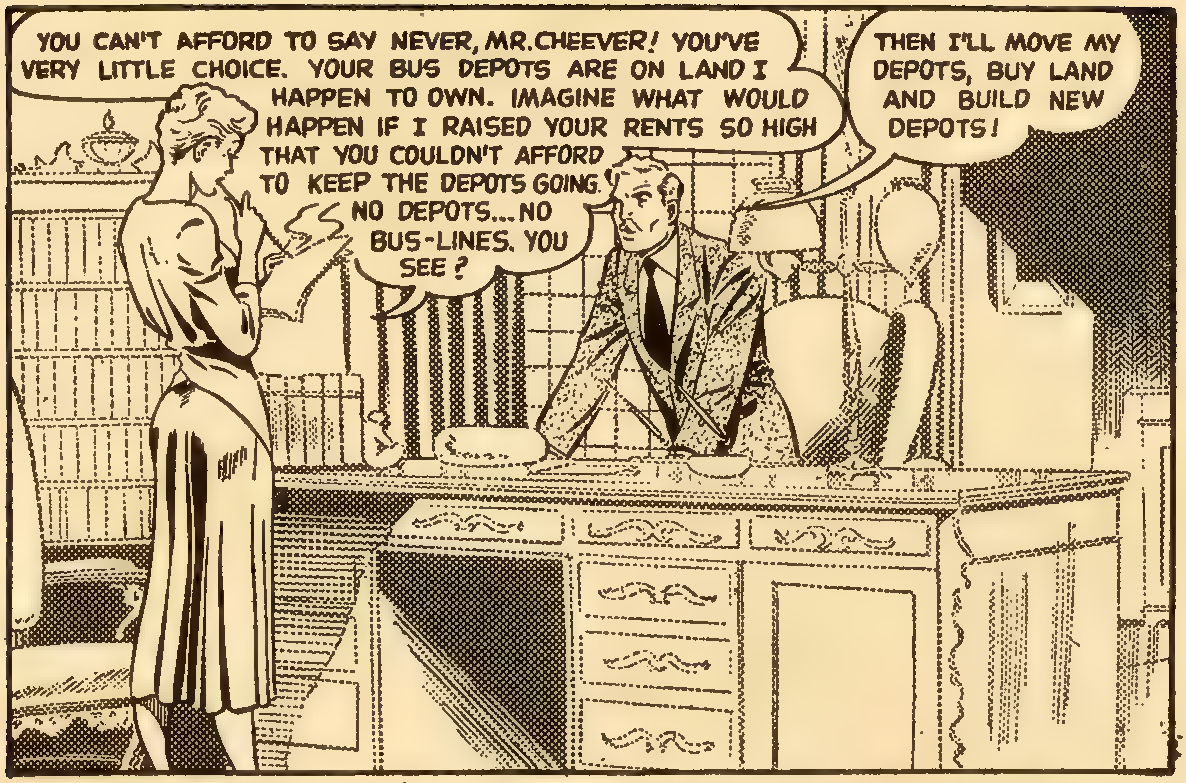
MARCUS, BE A NICE BOY. I CAN DO YOU SOME GOOD. WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO BE — LET'S SEE — AN EXECUTIVE AT THE MINES?
YOUR UNDERLING? THE MACHINE ISN'T THAT POWERFUL, RUST. WHY... WE COULDN'T EVEN CONTROL CONGRESSMAN SHEARING LAST YEAR.

SO WE CAN'T BUY SHEARING, THE FOOL. NEXT YEAR WE DUMP HIM AND GET OUR OWN CONGRESSMAN. I TELL YOU... WE CAN'T LOSE, AS LONG AS PEOPLE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WE'RE UP TO. FOR EXAMPLE, TAKE THE RAILROAD COMBINE. I'VE REFUSED TO RENEW THEIR FRANCHISE. THEY'LL HAVE TO SELL OUT TO ME OR GO OUT OF BUSINESS. I'M PLANNING BIG THINGS... VERY BIG THINGS!

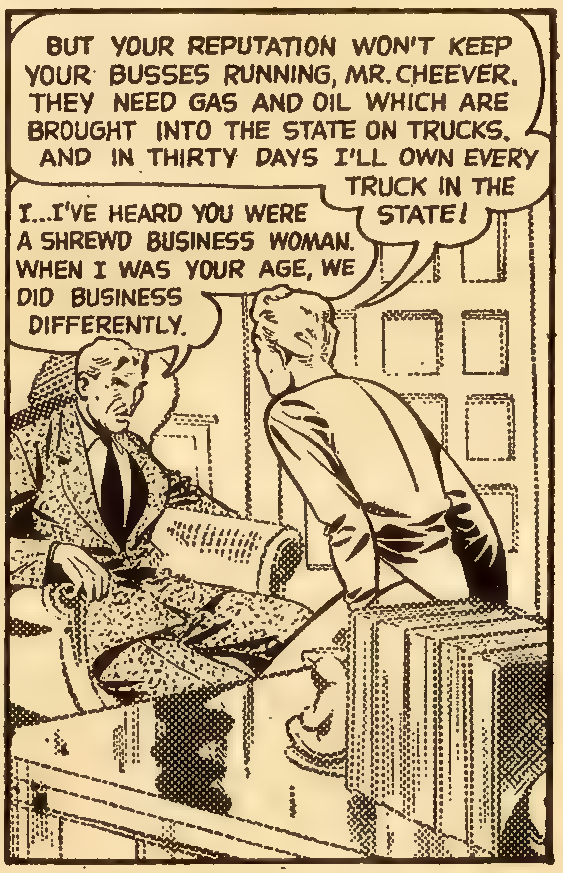
AND NEXT MONTH I'LL OWN EVERY TRUCK LINE IN THE STATE. YOU COULD DO A LOT WORSE THAN PLAY BALL WITH ME... ON MY TERMS. TAKE YOUR PICK OF SOME EXECUTIVE JOB AT THE MINES.
I... I'LL LET YOU KNOW, RUST. MEANWHILE, THANKS FOR THE LESSON, MY DEAR, GOOD BYE.

HE'LL WORK FOR ME... HE HAS NO OTHER CHOICE. BUT I'VE GOT TO WATCH MY JEFFERS. HE LIKES TO GIVE ORDERS BUT NOT TAKE THEM — AND THAT SORT OF THING DOESN'T LAST LONG. I'VE GOT TO LET HIM THINK HE'S SAFE, CLEVER, AND THAT HE'S FOOLING ME, AND THEN, WHEN I WANT TO... POOF!

MRS. MASSON, MA'AM, YOU HAVE ANOTHER CALLER. A MR. CHEEVER TO SEE YOU.
SO SOON? I DIDN'T EXPECT THE OLD FOOL TILL TWO O'CLOCK. VERY WELL, SEND HIM UP AND REMEMBER: WE'RE NOT TO BE DISTURBED FOR ANYTHING!
HERE'S WHERE LITTLE RUST ADDS ANOTHER BULWARK TO THE MASSON EMPIRE. DEALING WITH THESE DODDERING BUSINESS MEN IS CHILD'S PLAY.
AH, MR. CHEEVER! COME IN.
GOOD MORNING, MRS. MASSON. I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF ARRIVING EARLIER THAN WE ARRANGED. YOU WISHED TO DISCUSS SOMETHING WITH ME?
I WISH TO PROPOSE SOMETHING TO YOU, MR. CHEEVER. I'LL BE QUITE DIRECT. YOUR BUS-LINES COVER THE ENTIRE STATE. AND STOCK IN YOUR COMPANY IS SELLING AT MORE THAN $100 A SHARE. THEREFORE I PROPOSE TO BUY 51% OF YOUR STOCK AT $50 A SHARE!
YOU WHAT? MRS. MASSON, DO YOU THINK I'M OUT OF MY MIND? I'D NEVER SELL A CONTROLLING INTEREST IN MY COMPANY... AND CERTAINLY NOT FOR HALF WHAT THE STOCK'S WORTH!


YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO SAY NEVER, MR. CHEEVER! YOU'VE VERY LITTLE CHOICE. YOUR BUS DEPOTS ARE ON LAND I HAPPEN TO OWN. IMAGINE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I RAISED YOUR RENTS SO HIGH THAT YOU COULDN'T AFFORD TO KEEP THE DEPOTS GOING.
NO DEPOTS... NO BUS-LINES. YOU SEE?
THEN I'LL MOVE MY DEPOTS, BUY LAND AND BUILD NEW DEPOTS!

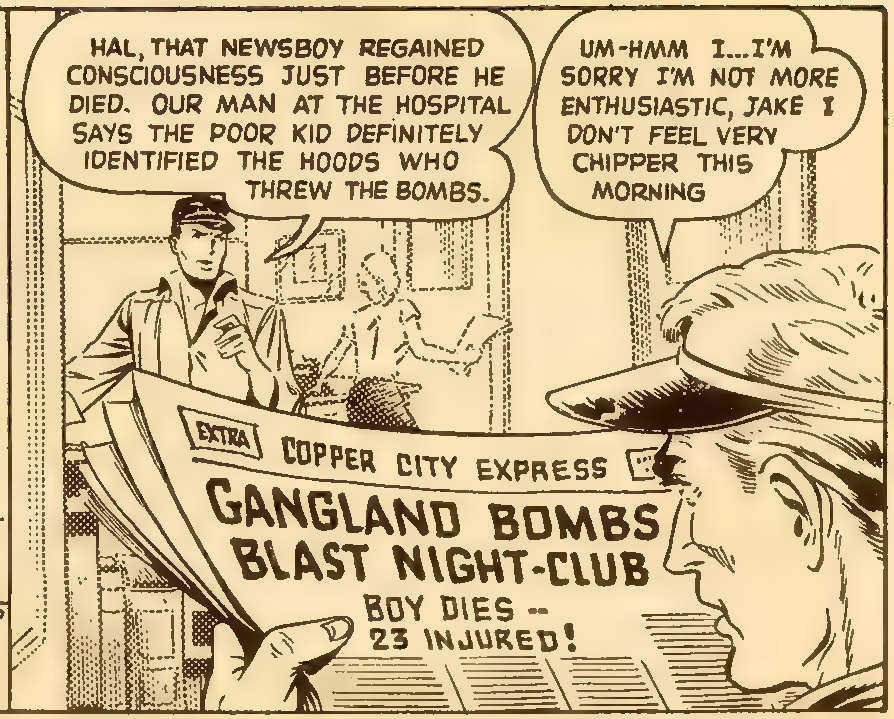
BLAST IT! YOU CAN'T PUSH J.J. CHEEVER AROUND! I'VE BUILT A GOOD REPUTATION IN COPPER CITY, AND IMPORTANT PEOPLE WILL BACK ME!
IT'S ON ACCOUNT OF YOUR REPUTATION THAT I'M MAKING YOU SUCH A REASONABLE OFFER. IT LOOKS BETTER THAT WAY ON THE SURFACE...


BUT YOUR REPUTATION WON'T KEEP YOUR BUSSES RUNNING, MR. CHEEVER. THEY NEED GAS AND OIL WHICH ARE BROUGHT INTO THE STATE ON TRUCKS. AND IN THIRTY DAYS I'LL OWN EVERY TRUCK IN THE STATE!
I...I'VE HEARD YOU WERE A SHREWD BUSINESS WOMAN. WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, WE DID BUSINESS DIFFERENTLY.

IT...IT'S ALL HAPPENED SO SUDDENLY. TEN MINUTES AGO I OWNED THE LARGEST BUS-LINE IN THE STATE. NOW I'M A... A JUNIOR PARTNER. I DON'T QUITE KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
THERE'S NOTHING MORE TO SAY, MR. CHEEVER... EXCEPT ABOUT A MINOR MATTER OF RAISING THE BUS FARES...
RAISE THE FARES! Y-YOU'RE JOKING. WE GOT AN OFFICIAL RAISE ONLY LAST MONTH LIKE THE OTHER BUS-LINES.
THEY WILL GO HIGHER, MR. CHEEVER. WE'LL KEEP GETTING "OFFICIAL" APPROVAL AS LONG AS I WANT IT!
FARES ARE AS HIGH NOW AS PEOPLE WILL PAY THEY CAN'T GO HIGHER!
YOU THINK SO? YOU THINK YOU CAN RUN ME, RUN THE STATE AND ALL THE PEOPLE IN IT LIKE SO MANY PUPPETS? YOU'RE WRONG... DEAD WRONG!
CONTROL YOURSELF, MR. CHEEVER, IT'S BAD FOR YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE. YOU'LL SEE I'M RIGHT. WITHIN A WEEK I'LL HAVE BOUGHT OUT EVERY OTHER BUS-LINE IN THE STATE. PEOPLE WILL RIDE ON OUR BUSSES OR NOT RIDE AT ALL! AND THEY'LL PAY WHATEVER I CHOOSE TO CHARGE THEM. NOW STOP SNIVELLING AND ACT LIKE A MAN!

HAVEN'T YOU ANY GUTS AT ALL? YOU'RE NOT PLAYING FOR MARBLES, YOU'RE PLAYING FOR *MILLIONS!* EITHER YOU'VE GOT THE NERVE TO CRACK THE WHIP, OR YOU DON'T BELONG IN BUSINESS.
YOU CALL THIS BUSINESS? IT'S ROBBERY! YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN A THIEF WITH A GUN!
I'M AN OLD MAN, MRS. MASSON. WHEN I THINK OF ALL THE PEOPLE, OWNERS AND PASSENGERS ALIKE, WHO'LL SUFFER FROM THIS, I...
TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT, MR. CHEEVER. I'VE LAID MY CARDS ON THE TABLE. YOU CAN MAKE MONEY AS MY JUNIOR PARTNER OR RUIN YOURSELF BY OPPOSING ME. I'VE NO TIME OR SYMPATHY FOR WEAKLINGS. WELL, WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER?
YOU KNOW MY ANSWER, MRS. MASSON. MY WIFE, MY CHILDREN AND MY EMPLOYEES ARE DEPENDENT UPON ME. I WON'T LET THEM SUFFER.
I'LL CALL MY LAWYER NOW AND GET THINGS SETTLED. YOU WON'T REGRET THIS, MR. CHEEVER. I'VE SEEN A LOT OF THE WORLD IN MY TIME AND I KNOW ONE THING: THE LITTLE ANIMALS ARE EATEN BY THE BIG ANIMALS. I DON'T INTEND TO BE EATEN, I INTEND TO HAVE THE WORLD ON A SILVER PLATTER... AND A KNIFE AND FORK IN MY HANDS!

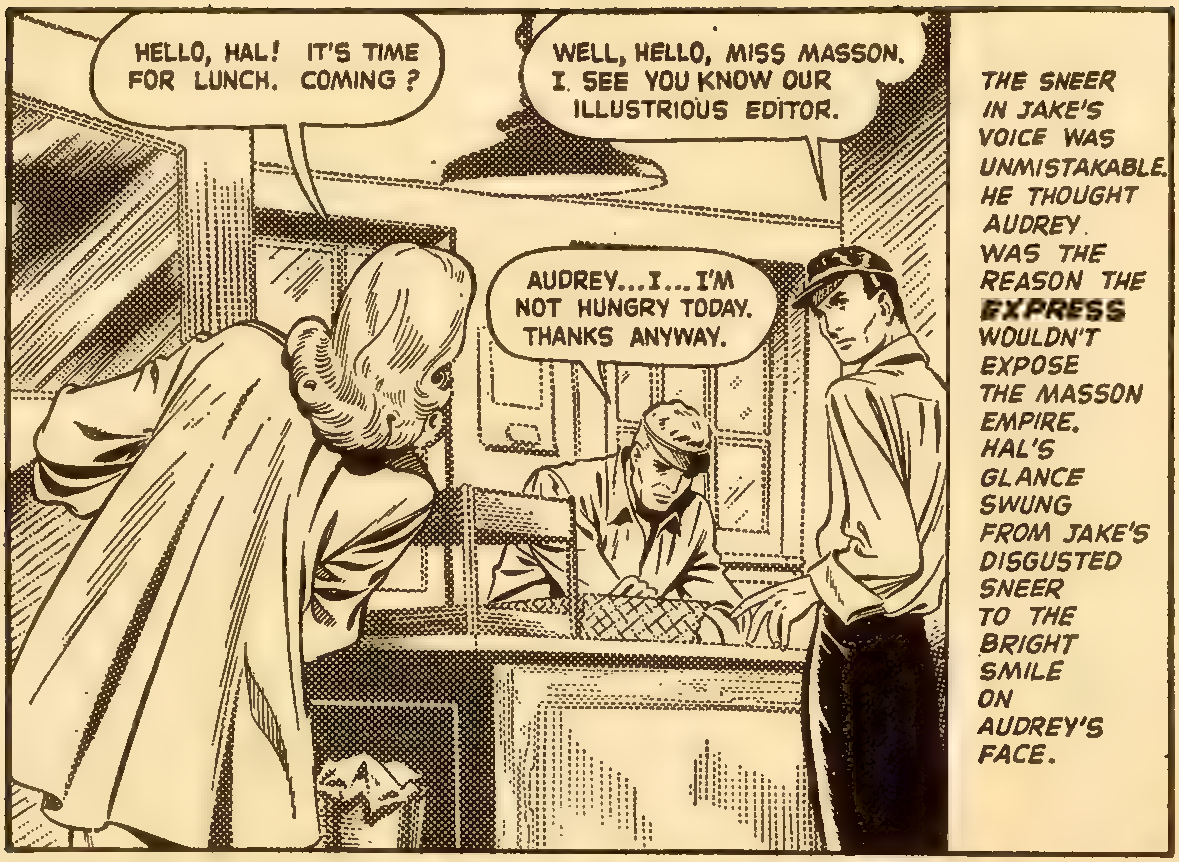
ACROSS TOWN IN THE **EXPRESS** CITY ROOM, HAL WEBER READ HIS MORNING HEADLINE FOR THE TENTH TIME AND STILL COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. THE EXPLOSION POINTED DIRECTLY AT RUST AND YET FOR THE TENTH TIME THAT MORNING HE REFUSED TO ADMIT THAT SHE HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH LAST NIGHT'S BRUTAL VIOLENCE.


HAL, THAT NEWSBOY REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS JUST BEFORE HE DIED. OUR MAN AT THE HOSPITAL SAYS THE POOR KID DEFINITELY IDENTIFIED THE HOODS WHO THREW THE BOMBS.
UM-HMM I...I'M SORRY I'M NOT MORE ENTHUSIASTIC, JAKE I DON'T FEEL VERY CHIPPER THIS MORNING
EXTRA COPPER CITY EXPRESS
GANGLAND BOMBS BLAST NIGHT-CLUB
BOY DIES -- 23 INJURED!

WAIT'LL YOU HEAR THE REST! OUR MAN WENT THROUGH POLICE FILES AND FOUND PHOTOS OF THE TWO THUGS. WE KNOW WHO THEY ARE AND WHO THEY WORK FOR. OF COURSE THE POLICE ARE PLAYING IT DOWN, BUT—.
YOU KNOW WHO THEY WORK FOR? WHO, JAKE, WHO?

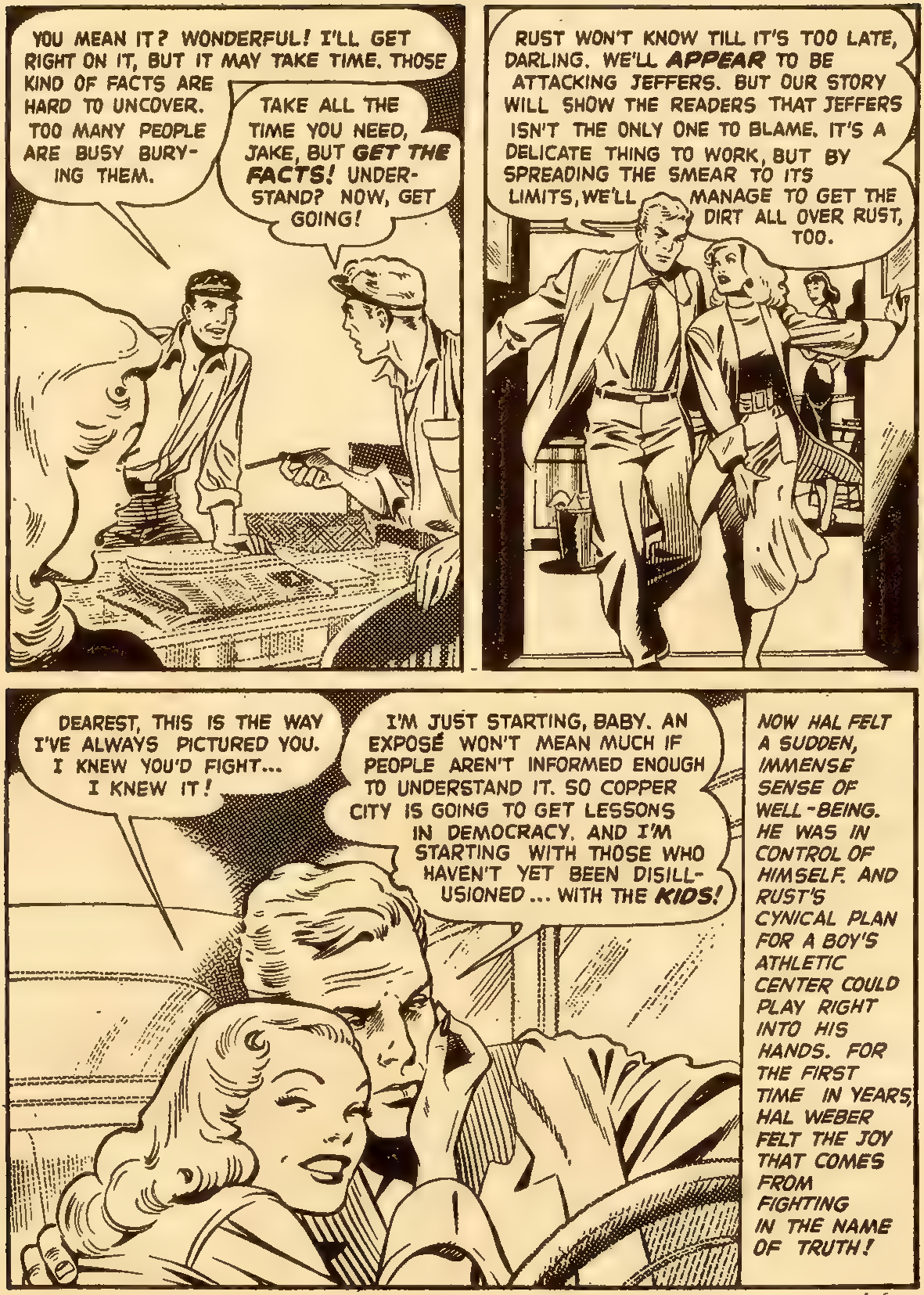
GET THIS FOR A NOVEL TWIST, HAL. THE TWO RATS WHO BOMBED JEFFER'S DIVE ARE IN THE EMPLOY OF NONE OTHER THAN... RUST MASSON!
RUST! OH, NO.. ARE YOU SURE ?

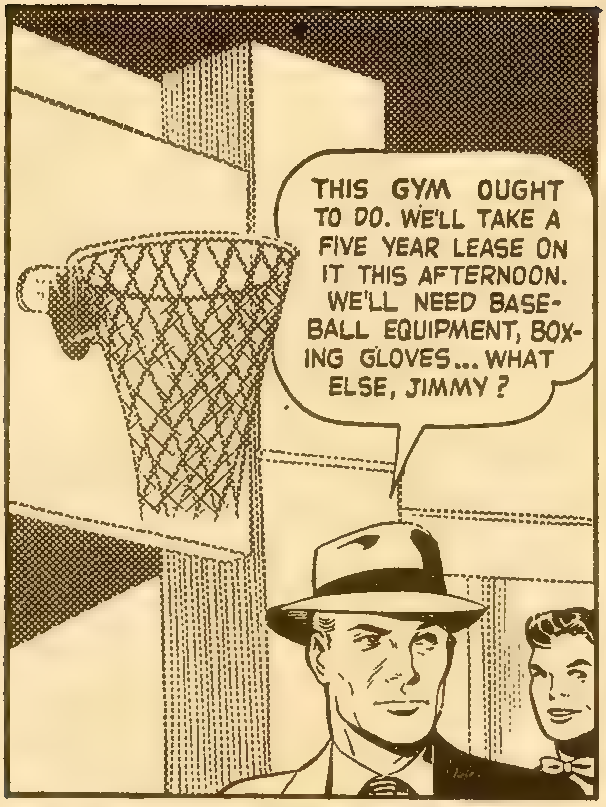
HEY, WHY THE GLOOM? THIS IS THE BIGGEST BREAK WE'VE EVER HAD. WE CAN BLAST THE MASSON MACHINE OFF THE FACE OF THE MAP. COME ON, HAL... LET'S FIGHT 'EM!
I... NO. LEAVE ME ALONE, JAKE, JUST LEAVE ME ALONE.
LET ME THINK ABOUT IT, JAKE. THERE'S A LOT YOU DON'T KNOW, AN AWFUL LOT.
ALL I KNOW IS THAT WE'VE GOT THEM DEAD TO RIGHTS. SNAP OUT OF IT, HAL! WE'VE GOT THE SCOOP OF THE YEAR IN OUR HANDS!
I'LL...I'LL LET YOU KNOW LATER, JAKE. WE'LL SEE. WE'LL SEE.
I THINK I GET IT, MR. WEBER. I MUST BE AWFUL DUMB. IT'S JUST THAT I COULDN'T QUITE BELIEVE YOU—. WELL, NEVER MIND. I HAD YOU WRONG.
GANGLAND BOMBS BLAST COPPER CITY
ONE DEAD
NE INJURED
HAL AVOIDED JAKE'S EYES AND TRIED TO TAKE REFUGE BEHIND THE NEWSPAPER. BUT HE KNEW HIS MASQUERADE AS THE CRUSADING EDITOR, WAS OVER. JAKE KNEW THE TRUTH. SOON THEY'D ALL KNOW THAT HAL WEBER WAS A WEAKLING WHO ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE TWISTED AROUND A WOMAN'S FINGER.


HELLO, HAL! IT'S TIME FOR LUNCH. COMING?
WELL, HELLO, MISS MASSON. I SEE YOU KNOW OUR ILLUSTRIOUS EDITOR.
AUDREY...I...I'M NOT HUNGRY TODAY. THANKS ANYWAY.
THE SNEER IN JAKE'S VOICE WAS UNMISTAKABLE. HE THOUGHT AUDREY WAS THE REASON THE EXPRESS WOULDN'T EXPOSE THE MASSON EMPIRE. HAL'S GLANCE SWUNG FROM JAKE'S DISGUSTED SNEER TO THE BRIGHT SMILE ON AUDREY'S FACE.

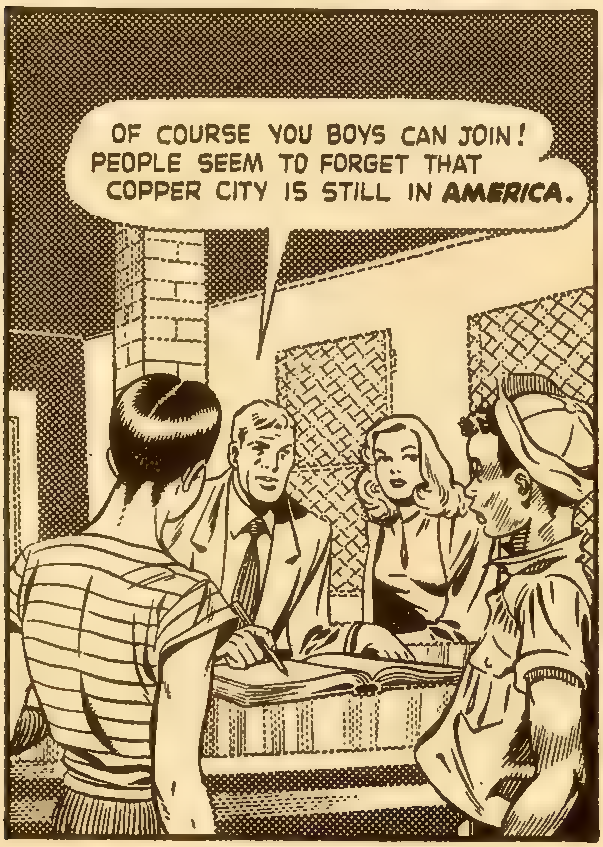
THAT POOR NEWSBOY! HAL, ISN'T THERE SOME WAY WE CAN USE THIS TO AVENGE HIS DEATH?
SAY! IT TAKES ME A LONG TIME TO GET AN IDEA, BUT WHEN I DO IT'S A BEAUT! JAKE COME HERE A SECOND, WILL YOU?

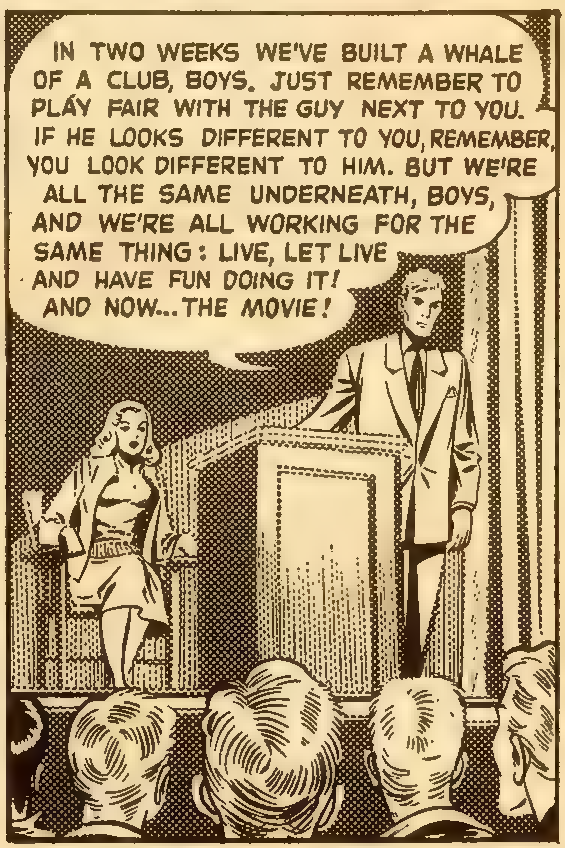
JAKE, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING... AND YOU'RE WRONG. MISS MASSON IS ON OUR SIDE. NOW, LOOK: SCOUT AROUND TOWN AND DIG UP EVERY-THING YOU CAN FIND ON LAST NIGHT'S BLAST. GET ENOUGH TO INDICT JEFFERS AND RUST MASSON AND ANYBODY ELSE INVOLVED. DON'T WORRY WHOSE TOES YOU STEP ON. GOT IT?


YOU MEAN IT? WONDERFUL! I'LL GET RIGHT ON IT, BUT IT MAY TAKE TIME. THOSE KIND OF FACTS ARE HARD TO UNCOVER. TOO MANY PEOPLE ARE BUSY BURYING THEM.
TAKE ALL THE TIME YOU NEED, JAKE, BUT GET THE FACTS! UNDERSTAND? NOW, GET GOING!
RUST WON'T KNOW TILL IT'S TOO LATE, DARLING. WE'LL APPEAR TO BE ATTACKING JEFFERS. BUT OUR STORY WILL SHOW THE READERS THAT JEFFERS ISN'T THE ONLY ONE TO BLAME. IT'S A DELICATE THING TO WORK, BUT BY SPREADING THE SMEAR TO ITS LIMITS, WE'LL MANAGE TO GET THE DIRT ALL OVER RUST, TOO.
DEAREST, THIS IS THE WAY I'VE ALWAYS PICTURED YOU. I KNEW YOU'D FIGHT... I KNEW IT!
I'M JUST STARTING, BABY. AN EXPOSÉ WON'T MEAN MUCH IF PEOPLE AREN'T INFORMED ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND IT. SO COPPER CITY IS GOING TO GET LESSONS IN DEMOCRACY, AND I'M STARTING WITH THOSE WHO HAVEN'T YET BEEN DISILLUSIONED... WITH THE KIDS!
NOW HAL FELT A SUDDEN, IMMENSE SENSE OF WELL-BEING. HE WAS IN CONTROL OF HIMSELF. AND RUST'S CYNICAL PLAN FOR A BOY'S ATHLETIC CENTER COULD PLAY RIGHT INTO HIS HANDS. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS, HAL WEBER FELT THE JOY THAT COMES FROM FIGHTING IN THE NAME OF TRUTH!


THIS GYM OUGHT TO DO. WE'LL TAKE A FIVE YEAR LEASE ON IT THIS AFTERNOON. WE'LL NEED BASEBALL EQUIPMENT, BOXING GLOVES... WHAT ELSE, JIMMY?

HEY, LEFTY, WHO TAUGHT YOU TO SWIM? YOU LOOK LIKE A THRASHING COMBINE AT HARVEST TIME.
OH, YEAH? JUMP IN, MR. WEBER, AND I'LL RACE YOU ACROSS THE POOL.


OF COURSE YOU BOYS CAN JOIN! PEOPLE SEEM TO FORGET THAT COPPER CITY IS STILL IN AMERICA.


IN TWO WEEKS WE'VE BUILT A WHALE OF A CLUB, BOYS. JUST REMEMBER TO PLAY FAIR WITH THE GUY NEXT TO YOU. IF HE LOOKS DIFFERENT TO YOU, REMEMBER, YOU LOOK DIFFERENT TO HIM. BUT WE'RE ALL THE SAME UNDERNEATH, BOYS, AND WE'RE ALL WORKING FOR THE SAME THING: LIVE, LET LIVE AND HAVE FUN DOING IT! AND NOW... THE MOVIE!

FROM ALL OVER COPPER CITY BOYS FLOCKED TO THE EXPRESS ATHLETIC CLUB. AND ALL OVER TOWN PARENTS TALKED ABOUT IT. THEY GREETED HAL AND TOOK HIM INTO THEIR HOMES LIKE THE GOOD FRIEND THEY THOUGHT HIM TO BE. IN ALL THAT WHILE, RUST WAS TOO BUSY TO CONTACT HIM. AND HAL THANKED HIS LUCKY STARS FOR HIS FREEDOM.

OOPS, SORRY! I SHOULD HAVE KNOCKED, BUT I'VE GOT SUCH GOOD NEWS. HAL, THE JOB'S FINISHED! I'VE GOT ALL THE DOPE ON THAT EXPLOSION WE'LL EVER NEED. WHAT NEXT?

FINE! HOTFOOT IT OVER TO THE OFFICE AND START YOUR TYPEWRITER CLACKING. WHEN I GET BACK I WANT TO SEE SMOKE COMING OUT OF IT!

THIS IS WHAT I WANT OUT OF LIFE, DARLING. WORK THAT MEANS SOMETHING... AND YOU IN MY ARMS.

WHEN THIS FIGHT'S WON WE'LL SEE WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT KEEPING ME IN YOUR ARMS ALL THE TIME, AND— OH, HAL, SOMEBODY AT THE DOOR AGAIN.

HI, THERE! COULDJA USE SOME MORE LOWDOWN?

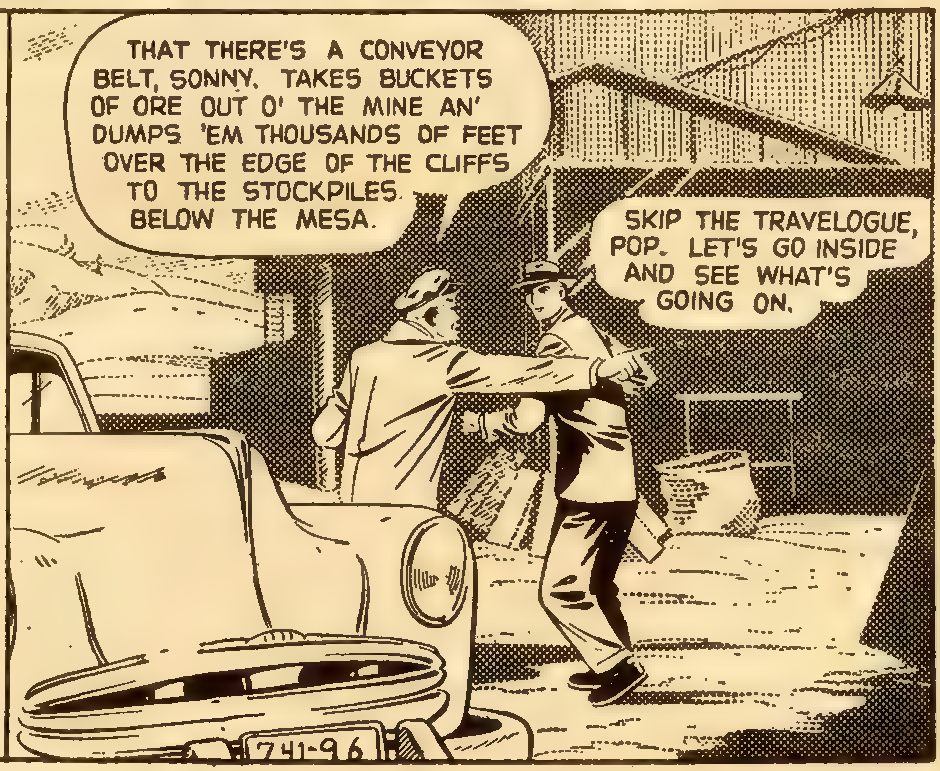
HELLO, POP. SIT DOWN AND UNBURDEN YOURSELF.

I'LL LEAVE YOU TWO ALONE. SEE YOU AT THE OFFICE, HAL. 'BYE.

I GOT NEWS FER YOU. THE FAMOUS MASSON MINES ARE ABOUT TO CAVE IN! MINERS ARE MADDER'N WET HENS. ONE O' THESE DAYS THEY'LL REFUSE TO GO TO WORK. THEM MINES IS DANGED DANGEROUS!
THEY'RE NOT IN GOOD REPAIR? I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.

IT'S THE TRUTH, SONNY. THAT RUST FEMALE IS SO BUSY WITH HER BLAMED POLITICAL HOKEY-POKEY SHE AIN'T PAID NO ATTENTION TO THE MINES. THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR SENT HER A THIRD WARNING JUST YESTERDAY. THEM MINES ARE IN ROTTEN SHAPE, AND IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IT, JEST FOLLER ME. I'LL SHOW YOU!

HAL'S MIND WORKED FURIOUSLY AS HE AND THE OLD CABBY DROVE TO THE NEAREST MINE ENTRANCE. WHY HAD RUST NEGLECTED SAFETY PRECAUTIONS? DIDN'T SHE REALIZE WHAT A DISASTROUS CAVE-IN COULD DO TO HER MINES **AND** HER POLITICAL CHICANERY?


THAT THERE'S A CONVEYOR BELT, SONNY. TAKES BUCKETS OF ORE OUT O' THE MINE AN' DUMPS 'EM THOUSANDS OF FEET OVER THE EDGE OF THE CLIFFS TO THE STOCKPILES BELOW THE MESA.
SKIP THE TRAVELOGUE, POP. LET'S GO INSIDE AND SEE WHAT'S GOING ON.
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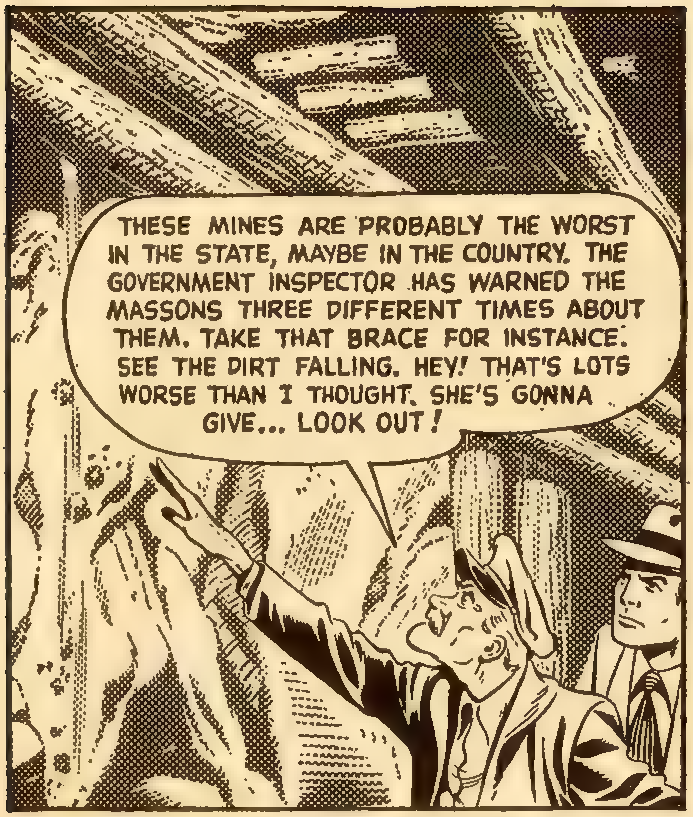
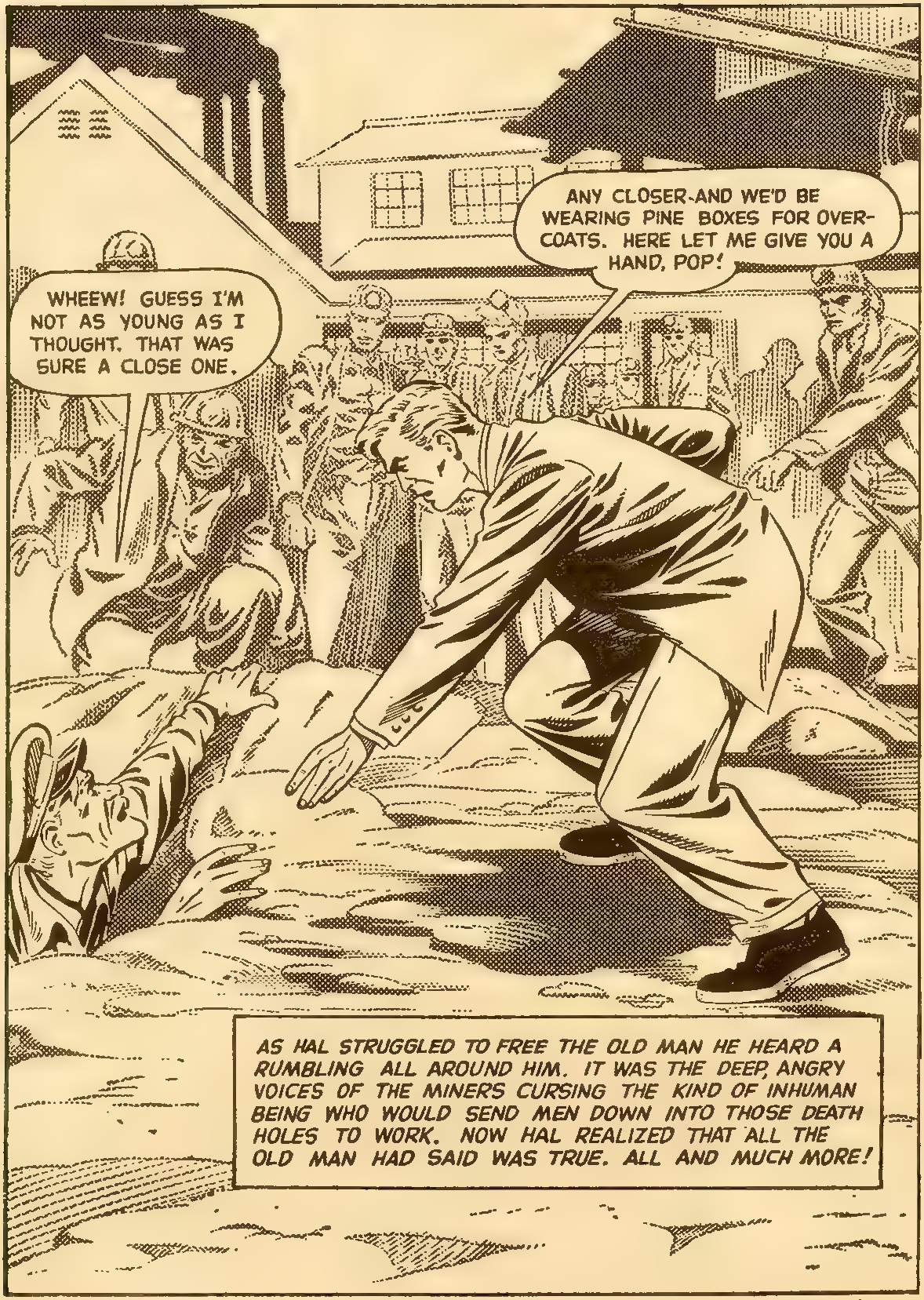
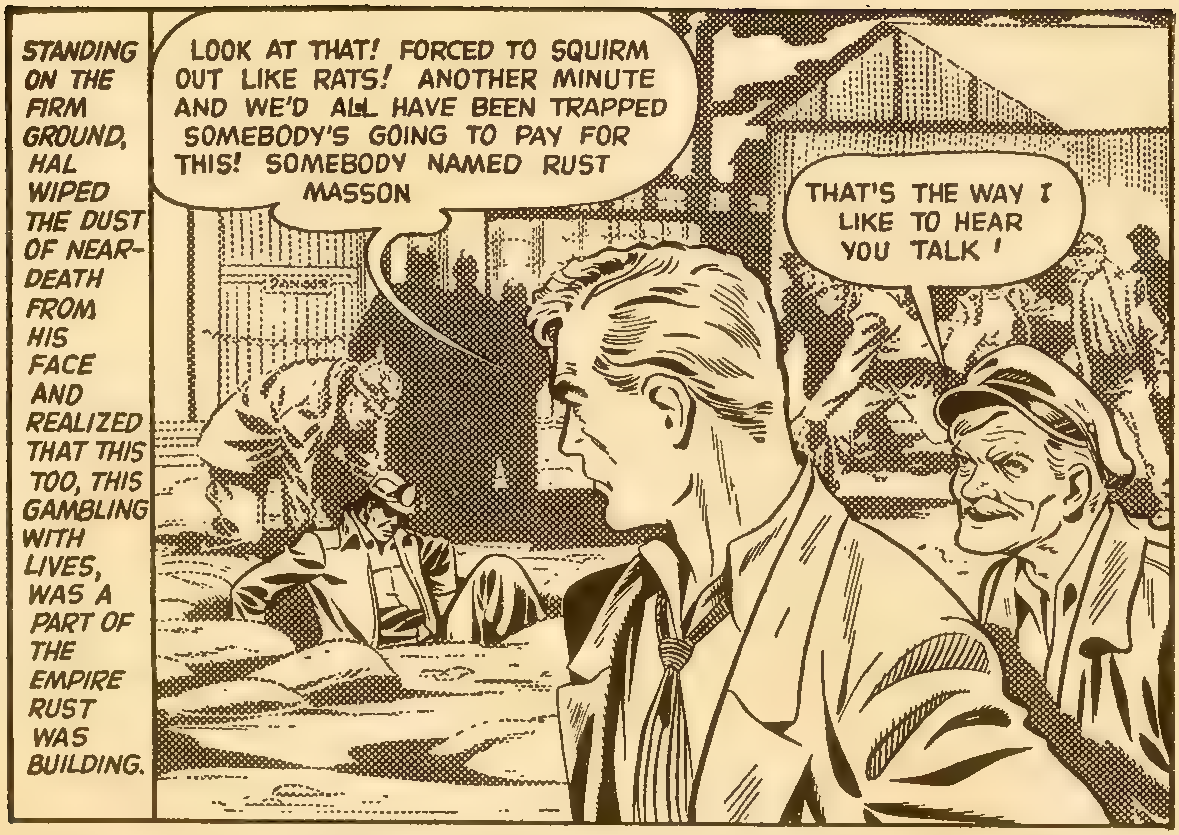

THESE MINES ARE PROBABLY THE WORST IN THE STATE, MAYBE IN THE COUNTRY. THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR HAS WARNED THE MASSONS THREE DIFFERENT TIMES ABOUT THEM. TAKE THAT BRACE FOR INSTANCE. SEE THE DIRT FALLING. HEY! THAT'S LOTS WORSE THAN I THOUGHT. SHE'S GONNA GIVE... LOOK OUT!

BACK AGAINST THE WALL! IT'S A CAVE-IN!

I MUST HAVE CAUGHT ONE OF THOSE ROCKS IN MY NOGGIN. GOOD THING YOU PULLED ME OUT OF THERE.
STEADY, OLD TIMER. YOU'LL BE OKAY. AND WHEN WE GET OUT OF HERE THERE'LL BE THE RECKONING. I'LL SEE TO THAT.

YOU MEAN *IF* WE GET OUT OF HERE.
WE'LL MAKE IT! LOOK! THE CAVE-IN BROKE AN OPENING TO THE SURFACE. THAT'S GONNA BE OUR DOOR, POP!


WHEEW! GUESS I'M NOT AS YOUNG AS I THOUGHT. THAT WAS SURE A CLOSE ONE.
ANY CLOSER-AND WE'D BE WEARING PINE BOXES FOR OVER-COATS. HERE LET ME GIVE YOU A HAND, POP!
AS HAL STRUGGLED TO FREE THE OLD MAN HE HEARD A RUMBLING ALL AROUND HIM. IT WAS THE DEEP, ANGRY VOICES OF THE MINERS CURSING THE KIND OF INHUMAN BEING WHO WOULD SEND MEN DOWN INTO THOSE DEATH HOLES TO WORK. NOW HAL REALIZED THAT ALL THE OLD MAN HAD SAID WAS TRUE. ALL AND MUCH MORE!


STANDING ON THE FIRM GROUND, HAL WIPED THE DUST OF NEAR-DEATH FROM HIS FACE AND REALIZED THAT THIS TOO, THIS GAMBLING WITH LIVES, WAS A PART OF THE EMPIRE RUST WAS BUILDING.
LOOK AT THAT! FORCED TO SQUIRM OUT LIKE RATS! ANOTHER MINUTE AND WE'D ALL HAVE BEEN TRAPPED SOMEBODY'S GOING TO PAY FOR THIS! SOMEBODY NAMED RUST MASSON
THAT'S THE WAY I LIKE TO HEAR YOU TALK!

JAKE, TIE UP THAT STORY ON THE RUST MASSON THUGS AND GET IT READY TO PRINT. THIS TIME THE LID'S OFF FOR GOOD!
GEE, HAL, ACTION AT LAST! I KNOW A YOUNG LADY WHO'D LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT THIS WHY DON'T YOU CALL HER?

HELLO, AUDREY, HONEY, I THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW THAT WE'RE READY TO PRINT THAT EXPOSÉ STORY AS PLANNED.
OH, HAL, DARLING, I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. GIVE 'EM THE WORKS. GOOD LUCK, DEAREST.

HERE'S THE STUFF I PUT TOGETHER ON IT THIS MORNING. IT'S ALL SET TO GO I'M SURE GLAD WE DIDN'T HAVE TO KILL THIS STORY. AND BROTHER IT'S DYNAMITE!
GOOD! SEE WHAT KIND OF PHOTOS YOU CAN ROUND UP IN THE MORGUE. I WANT TO PLAY EVERY ANGLE.
DID YOU WANT ME, MR WEBER?
YES! TELL THEM TO TEAR OUT THE LEAD STORY ON THE FRONT PAGE BURY IT INSIDE AND REPLACE IT WITH THIS
HELLO, WEBER SPEAKING
HELLO, HAL THIS IS RUST SOMETHING IMPORTANT HAS COME UP. DROP EVERYTHING! I WANT TO SEE YOU NOW!
HAL'S EYES NARROWED WITH SUSPICION AS HE LISTENED TO RUST HAD SHE LEARNED OF HIS PLANS? WHATEVER HER SCHEME WAS HE HAD TO KNOW IT HOLDING BACK ON THE EXPOSÉ COPY, HE HEADED FOR A RENDEZVOUS WITH RUST AT A SUBURBAN ROADHOUSE

LET'S FORGET OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP FOR A MOMENT, RUST. THIS IS STRICTLY BUSINESS. BAD BUSINESS. YOU CAN'T GO ON---
I CAN'T! SINCE WHEN DO YOU GIVE THE ORDERS IN THIS TOWN, MR. WEBER?
YES, WE'LL KEEP THIS STRICTLY BUSINESS WE'LL KEEP IT THAT WAY FOREVER, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT!
WAIT, RUST! THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT.
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEANT. YOU MEANT YOU WERE GOING SOFT, AFRAID. THERE'S NO ROOM FOR FEAR IN OUR KIND OF LOVE.
LOOK, RUST, I--- I'VE HAD A ROUGH DAY. THE MINE ACCIDENT ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE KIND OF-.

THE MINES? WHAT HAPPENED AT THE MINES?
A CAVE-IN WE WERE LUCKY TO ESCAPE WITH OUR LIVES YOU CAN'T GO ON RUNNING MINES THAT WAY, RUST! ONE OF THESE DAYS THEY'LL ALL CAVE IN.
I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE MINE CONDITIONS I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO KNOW ANYTHING 'TILL THE ROOF COLLAPSED AND WE WERE FACED WITH NATIONAL SCANDAL DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, HAL? IT WAS A TRICK! MARCUS JEFFERS IS SAFETY INSPECTOR OF THE MASSON MINES!
I KNEW YOU COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT I KNEW THERE HAD TO BE SOME EXPLANATION.
MARCUS JEFFERS IS OUT TO GET MY SCALP, HAL. IF YOU LOVE ME, YOU'LL HELP ME. WE'VE GOT TO STOP HIM AND WHIP HIM. IT'S A SHOWDOWN, HAL, AND WE'RE GOING TO COME OUT ON TOP.

KISS ME, HAL! KISS ME! WE'RE PARTNERS NOW. WE'VE GOT A FIGHT ON OUR HANDS AND WE'LL WIN IT — NO MATTER WHAT METHODS WE HAVE TO USE.
YOU KNOW I'VE NEVER WALKED AWAY FROM A GOOD FIGHT, RUST, BUT...
HAL! RUST! OH, I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN IT ALL ALONG. YOU'RE NO GOOD, EITHER OF YOU. NO GOOD AT ALL!

YOU HYPOCRITE, WITH YOUR BOYS CLUB AND YOUR GOOD CITIZENSHIP AND YOUR ERLANGER AWARD. HERE YOU SIT MAKING LOVE TO THE VERY DEVIL HERSELF.

HAL, BELIEVE ME, IT'S NOT MYSELF I'M PLEADING FOR (SOB) IT'S— IT'S THE WHOLE TOWN AND THE FAITH—
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, AUDREY. I HAVEN'T SOLD OUT

ALL RIGHT, HAL, THAT'S ENOUGH. YOU RUN ALONG NOW. I'LL CALL YOU IN THE MORNING.
YES, HAL, RUN ALONG. SHE DOESN'T WANT YOU AROUND NOW. SHE'LL WHISTLE WHEN SHE NEEDS YOU AGAIN.

NEVER MIND HER, HAL. I'LL BE IN TOUCH WITH YOU.
OH, HAL--- WHY, WHY, WHY?
COME ON, WEBER. THIS JOINT'S GETTING CROWDED.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT SECRET POWER YOU HAVE OVER HAL, BUT YOU DON'T CONTROL ME ANY LONGER. I KNOW ABOUT THAT RAILROAD DEAL, THE LUMBER MILLS, EVERYTHING.
I KNOW THE WAY YOU ROB AND KILL FOR POWER. RUST, YOU'RE NOT HUMAN. YOU'RE A MADWOMAN.
MAD! DON'T EVER USE THAT WORD AGAIN. I'LL SHOW YOU WHO'S MAD! MONK, GRAB HER!
THIS MAY TEACH YOU THAT I DON'T STAND FOR INTERFERENCE. IT'S A HARD LESSON TO LEARN, MY DEAR, AND SO I HAVE TO TEACH IT TO YOU THE HARDEST WAY I KNOW. LIKE THIS... AND THIS... AND THIS!
SLAP!

I REALLY SHOULDN'T DO THIS SORT OF THING. MY NAILS ARE SO BRITTLE. MONK, YOU'D BETTER PICK UP JEFFERS. CALL ME WHEN YOU'VE GOT HIM AND I'LL GIVE YOU FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS. AS FOR YOU, AUDREY, YOU'D BETTER GO HOME AND SLEEP THIS OFF. YOU'VE HAD A HARD NIGHT. AND THERE MAY BE HARDER ONES TO COME.
RUST HAD TRIUMPHED AGAIN. AND IN THE WAKE OF HER VICTORY LAY A HEARTBROKEN AUDREY, A SHATTERED HAL AND AN EXPOSÉ EDITION THAT WAS NEVER PRINTED.

COPPER-CITY EXPRES
MASSON

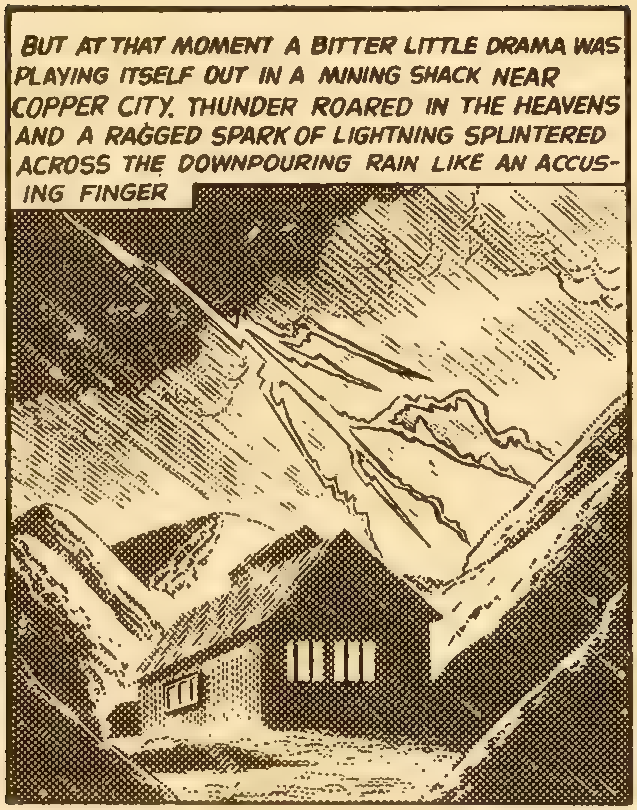
# CHAPTER 4 INDECISION

IN THE LIVING ROOM OF AUDREY'S LAKE COTTAGE HAL SAT WAITING, HIS THIRD DRINK IN HIS HAND. AUDREY'S ACCUSING FACE HAUNTED HIM. HE HAD TO SEE HER. BEFORE HE RETURNED TO THE OFFICE, AND TRY TO EXPLAIN HIS PRESENCE WITH RUST AT THE ROADHOUSE. WHY HAD HE LEFT THE ROADHOUSE WITHOUT HER? WHAT WAS TAKING HER SO LONG? SUDDENLY THE FRONT DOOR OPENED. AUDREY STUMBLED IN.

AUDREY! YOUR FACE!
WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? I DIDN'T EXPECT...? I...I FEEL SICK. SH-SHE KEPT SLAPPING ME. I THOUGHT SHE'D NEVER STOP AND... AND HE WAS HOLDING MY ARMS. I FEEL SO... SICK.

EASY, DARLING. GOOD LORD, I'LL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF FOR LEAVING YOU. I MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED SOMETHING VICIOUS LIKE THIS. THAT WOMAN'S A MAD DOG!
SHE... SHE'S GOING TO KILL JEFFERS. I HEARD HER TELL MONK TO PICK HIM UP.

BETTER GO TO BED NOW, DARLING. I HAVE TO LEAVE YOU. I'VE GOT TO SEE A MAN NAMED JEFFERS... ABOUT A MAD DOG.
I'M GOING WITH YOU. I MISJUDGED YOU SO TERRIBLY, DEAREST. YOU'RE ALL I HAVE TO TRUST IN AND... I WANT TO BE WITH YOU. COME... LET'S GO!


BUT AT THAT MOMENT A BITTER LITTLE DRAMA WAS PLAYING ITSELF OUT IN A MINING SHACK NEAR COPPER CITY. THUNDER ROARED IN THE HEAVENS AND A RAGGED SPARK OF LIGHTNING SPLINTERED ACROSS THE DOWNPOURING RAIN LIKE AN ACCUSING FINGER

RUST, WHAT'S THE MEANING OF HOLDING ME HERE? COULDN'T WE TALK THIS THING OUT?
WAKE UP, MARCUS. YOU'RE BEHIND TIMES, YOU LITTLE DOUBLE-CROSSER! YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE TO TALK TO ME. NOW YOU'LL TALK TO MY BOYS HERE... MR. SAFETY INSPECTOR!

I CAN EXPLAIN! YOU... YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND! YOU'RE---!
AM I, MARCUS? I'M SIMPLY PLAYING THE SAME GAME WE'VE ALWAYS PLAYED IN THIS TOWN... BUT WITH MY RULES. ALL RIGHT, MONK, TALK TO HIM!

PLEASE, MY HEAD... PLEASE!
NOW TALK TO HIM A LITTLE AROUND THE EYES, MONK.

HAL, DON'T GO IN THERE OR THEY'LL KILL YOU!
DON'T YOU SEE...THEY ARE ONLY THIEVES FALLING OUT WITH EACH OTHER. JEFFERS IS NO BETTER THAN THE OTHERS. YOU CAN'T DO ANY GOOD BY GOING IN THERE. LET'S LEAVE.
BUT...LOOK WHAT THEY'RE DOING TO HIM! THEY'LL KILL HIM! I'VE GOT TO GO IN!

DOWN DEEP INSIDE HAL KNEW THAT HE HAD TO ACT. THOUGH AUDREY HAD VERBALLY OPENED AN AVENUE OF ESCAPE TO HIM, THERE WAS A LOOK IN HER WIDE DEEP-SET EYES -- A CHALLENGING, QUESTIONING LOOK. IT WAS NOT HARD TO INTERPRET. EVEN THOUGH FEARFUL OF THE OUTCOME, SHE WAS HOPING HE WOULD STAND BY HIS BELIEFS.
RUST!
BE CAREFUL, HAL!
HAL, DARLING! WHAT BRINGS YOU UP HERE ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS?
LOOK, RUST, THIS KIND OF THING HAS TO STOP. YOU... YOU CAN'T...
THIS ISN'T YOUR AFFAIR, DARLING. YOU AND I HAVE A DIFFERENT KIND OF BUSINESS BETWEEN US... REMEMBER?
RUST... YOU...
SAY IT, HAL. DON'T LET HER TALK YOU OUT OF IT!

TALK ME OUT OF IT? WHY, DIDN'T YOU KNOW, DEAR? HAL TALKS STRAIGHT ONLY WHEN HE'S WITH ME!
YOU WOUDN'T UNDERSTAND IT,, BUT I TRUST HIM!
TELL HER, HAL. IF IT'S THE LAST THING YOU EVER DO, TELL HER WHAT SHE REALLY IS.
CALM DOWN, DARLING. RUST CAN'T BE AS VICIOUS AS YOU THINK. WE CAN STRAIGHTEN EVERYTHING WITHOUT A FIGHT.
HAL WATCHED AUDREY'S BRIGHT FACE CRUMBLE BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF HIS WEARINESS AND NOT EVEN THE TRIUMPHANT, INVITING SMILE THAT PLAYED ACROSS RUST'S SENSUOUS LIPS COULD STOP THE FEELING THAT SOMETHING INSIDE HIM WAS CRUMBLING TOO.
I SEE, CHILD. HE KNOWS WHAT'S GOOD FOR HIM. DON'T YOU HAL, DARLING?
PLEASE, AUDREY. LET ME HANDLE THIS MY WAY!
SAVE YOUR ALIBIS, HAL. THERE ISN'T ANY EXCUSE FOR THIS. AND I THOUGHT I MISJUDGED YOU BEFORE! HOW WRONG CAN A WOMAN BE?

MASSON M
COURTESY IN BU
YOU'RE A SLAVE! A SLAVE TO A BOTTLE AND A WOMAN. AND I DON'T CARE WHICH ONE KILLS YOU FIRST!
AUDREY! WAIT!

HER GLOVE... SHE MUST HAVE DROPPED IT MAYBE I'D BETTER.. I...
HAL... HAL... SHE'S NOT FOR YOU. YOU DON'T WANT THE LOVE OF A SCHOOLGIRL, FULL OF ROMANTIC ILLUSIONS. YOU WANT A LOVE TO MATCH THE WORLD YOU LIVE IN.
YOU WANT THE LOVE OF A WOMAN. YOU WANT A LOVE THAT BURNS YOU LIKE FIRE. AND MAKES YOU PLUNGE DEEP, DEEP INTO A POOL. AND YOU DROWN. AND YOU LOVE IT.
HEY, MONK. SEE THAT?
YEAH-H-H. AS LONG AS THE BOSS-LADY'S IN A GENEROUS MOOD, I'D LIKE TO HAVE A HANDOUT MYSELF.
SHUT THAT DIRTY FACE OF YOURS BEFORE I---!
OKAY, OKAY. I WAS ONLY KIDDING, HONEST.

WE'VE WASTED ENOUGH TIME. YOU, TINY, YOU GATHER UP THIS SACK OF OLD BONES AND DUMP HIM OUTSIDE TOWN. HAL, YOU HELP HIM. AND MONK YOU COME WITH ME. AFTER TONIGHT, I'LL NEED A BODY-GUARD TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A-DAY.
RUST WATCHED HAL'S FACE CLOSELY. WOULD HE BALK AT HELPING TINY WITH HIS DIRTY WORK? OR WAS HE TAMED? RUST WAS TESTING HIM... TRYING TO FIND OUT JUST HOW FAR SHE COULD MAKE HIM GO.

LOOK, RUST, I'M A NEWSPAPERMAN, NOT A HIRED GUNMAN.
HAW! LOOK WHO'S GETTIN' CHOOSY.

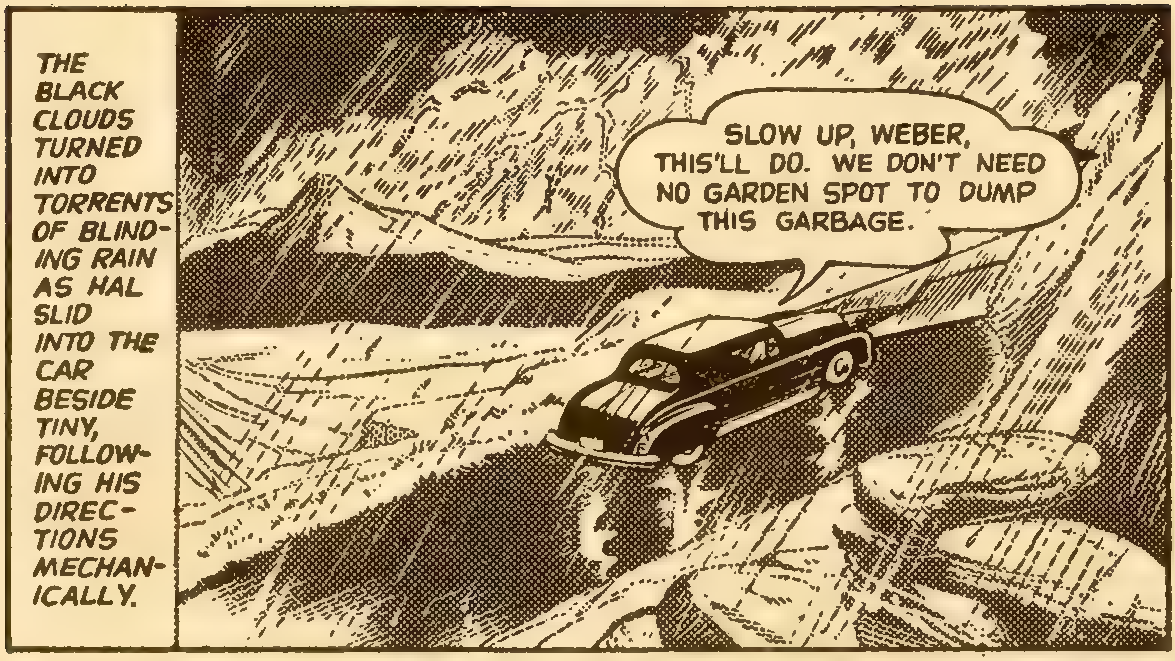
I MEAN IT, RUST. I'M WILLING TO PLAY ALONG WITH A LOT OF THINGS BUT THIS —
WEBER, WE GOT A CURE FOR GUYS WITH YELLOW STREAKS DOWN THEIR BACKS. WE JUST BREAK THEIR BACKS. HAW! GET IT?

RUST, GET THIS STUPID TUB OF GUTS OUT OF MY HAIR OR I'LL—!
HEY, LISSEN, YOU!
SHUT UP, TINY YOU DON'T DO ANY THINKING UNLESS I TELL YOU, UNDERSTAND?
AW-W.
RUST, TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?
JUST THIS ONE THING, DARLING. TINY WOULD BOTCH IT ALONE. JUST LEAVE JEFFERS BESIDE THE ROAD WITH ENOUGH CASH TO TAKE THE FIRST BUS AWAY FROM HERE. DO THIS ONE THING AND THEN COME BACK TO ME, HAL. I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU ALL NIGHT IF I HAVE TO. BUT... COME BACK TO ME TONIGHT!

AS HAL AND TINY LIFTED THE UNCONSCIOUS JEFFERS, RUST KNEW THAT SHE'D WON. HAL HAD FLARED UP, BUT SHE HAD ONLY TO SHOW THE PROMISE THAT LURKED IN HER CURVING LINES, THE KNOWING HINT ON HER FULL LIPS, AND HE WAS HERS... FOREVER.
HEY, THIS OLD GEEZER'S AS LIGHT AS A FEATHER
YEAH? THEN FLOAT HIM OUT OF HERE FAST!

ALL RIGHT, MONK, LET'S GET MOVING. I'M FLYING TO CENTERVILLE IN HALF AN HOUR. I'VE GOT THAT RAILROAD COMBINE SO BOXED-IN THEY'LL HAVE TO SELL OUT... AT MY TERMS.
WHAT'S THE HURRY, RUST? YOU HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO WASTE ON THAT PENCIL-PUSHING WEBER. HOW'S ABOUT SOME ATTENTION FOR A GUY WHO REALLY KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE HIMSELF... LIKE ME.

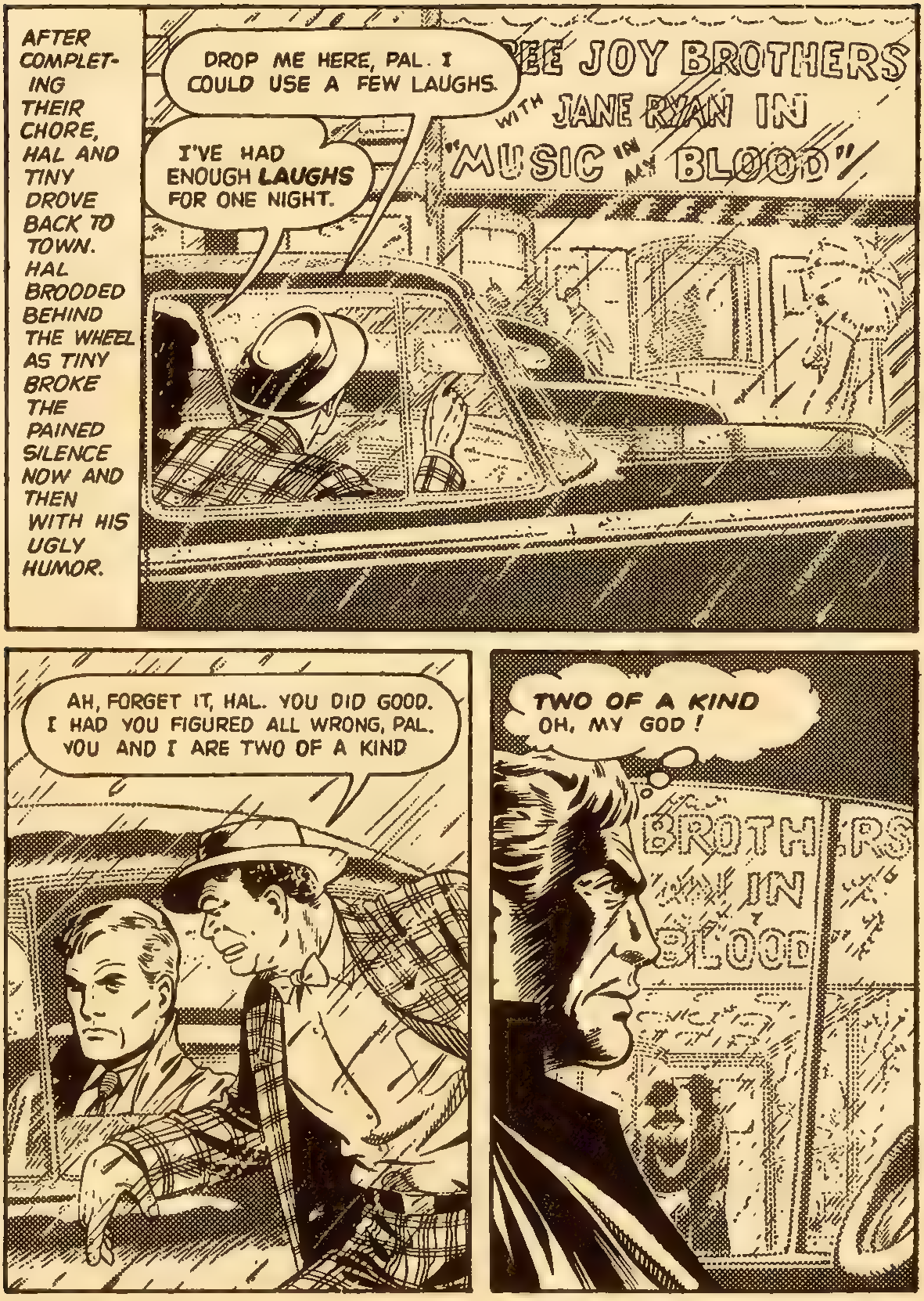
WHY, YOU ILLITERATE YEGG! I'M MRS. MASSON TO YOU, AND DON'T FORGET IT!
ILLITERATE, HUH? I CAN STILL SIGN MY NAME WITH THIS CANNON... RUST!


THE BLACK CLOUDS TURNED INTO TORRENTS OF BLINDING RAIN AS HAL SLID INTO THE CAR BESIDE TINY, FOLLOWING HIS DIRECTIONS MECHANICALLY.
SLOW UP, WEBER, THIS'LL DO. WE DON'T NEED NO GARDEN SPOT TO DUMP THIS GARBAGE.

WHY DON'T WE JUST LEAVE HIM ON THE HIGHWAY. A TRUCK MIGHT FINISH THE JOB FOR US. BOOM... CRUNCH... EXIT JEFFERS.
NO! YOU CAN'T LEAVE A MAN TO DIE LIKE THAT. GET HIM OFF THE ROAD!

WHAT'S THE MATTER, WEBER, YOU TURNING SOFT?

SMART THINKING, WEBER IF THAT LITTLE OLD GUY AIN'T DEAD BY MORNING THE RAIN'LL WASH HIM AWAY.
BUT WHAT'S GOING TO WASH THE BLOOD FROM MY HANDS?


AFTER COMPLETING THEIR CHORE, HAL AND TINY DROVE BACK TO TOWN. HAL BROODED BEHIND THE WHEEL AS TINY BROKE THE PAINED SILENCE NOW AND THEN WITH HIS UGLY HUMOR.
DROP ME HERE, PAL. I COULD USE A FEW LAUGHS.
I'VE HAD ENOUGH LAUGHS FOR ONE NIGHT.
JOY BROTHERS
WITH JANE RYAN IN
"MUSIC IN MY BLOOD"
AH, FORGET IT, HAL. YOU DID GOOD. I HAD YOU FIGURED ALL WRONG, PAL. YOU AND I ARE TWO OF A KIND
TWO OF A KIND
OH, MY GOD!

HAL THREW IN THE CLUTCH AND THE CAR ROCKETED FORWARD INTO THE NIGHT. HE RACED WILDLY FROM THE THOUGHT THAT HE WAS BECOMING A PARTNER IN A LIFE OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE. AND WHY? BECAUSE HE COULDN'T FIGHT A SCHEMING WOMAN.

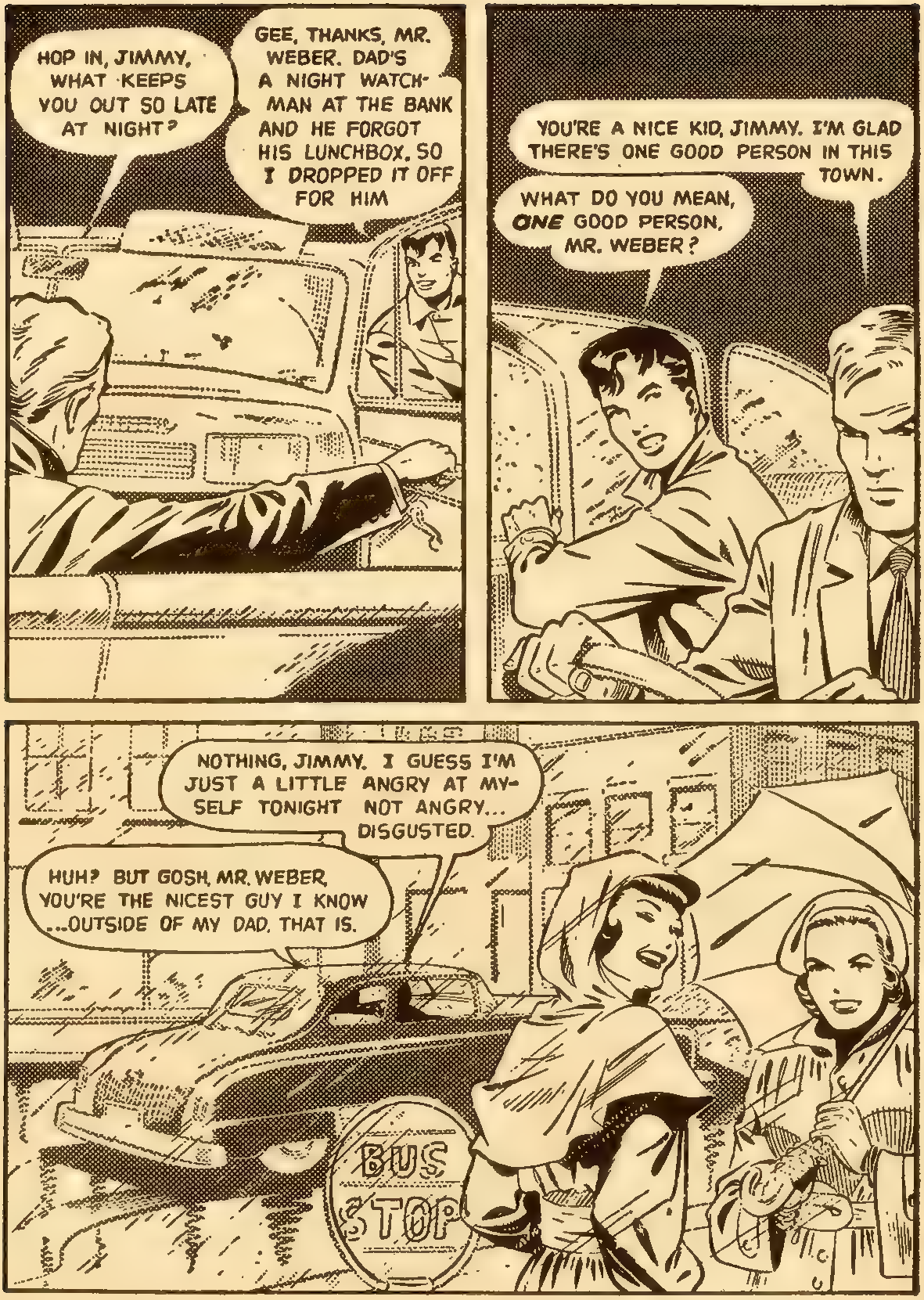
I...I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY BEFORE I GO OUT OF MY MIND.

I'VE COME A LONG WAY FROM THE YOUNG REPORTER WHO THOUGHT HE COULD CHANGE THE WORLD. THEY GAVE ME THE ERLANGER AWARD FOR IT, BUT IT WAS A LIE. THE WORLD CHANGED *ME*. AND I DON'T LIKE THE CHANGES.

THIS NIGHT HAD BECOME THE SYMBOL OF AN EVIL WORLD HAL HAD ONCE BATTLED AGAINST. BUT NOW HE NO LONGER FOUGHT THAT WORLD. IN FACT HE HAD BECOME A PART OF ITS EVIL.

THERE'S JIMMY SLOAN, MY COPY BOY. I'LL GIVE HIM A LIFT. I'M JUST FULL OF GOOD IDEAS TONIGHT.

BUS STOP

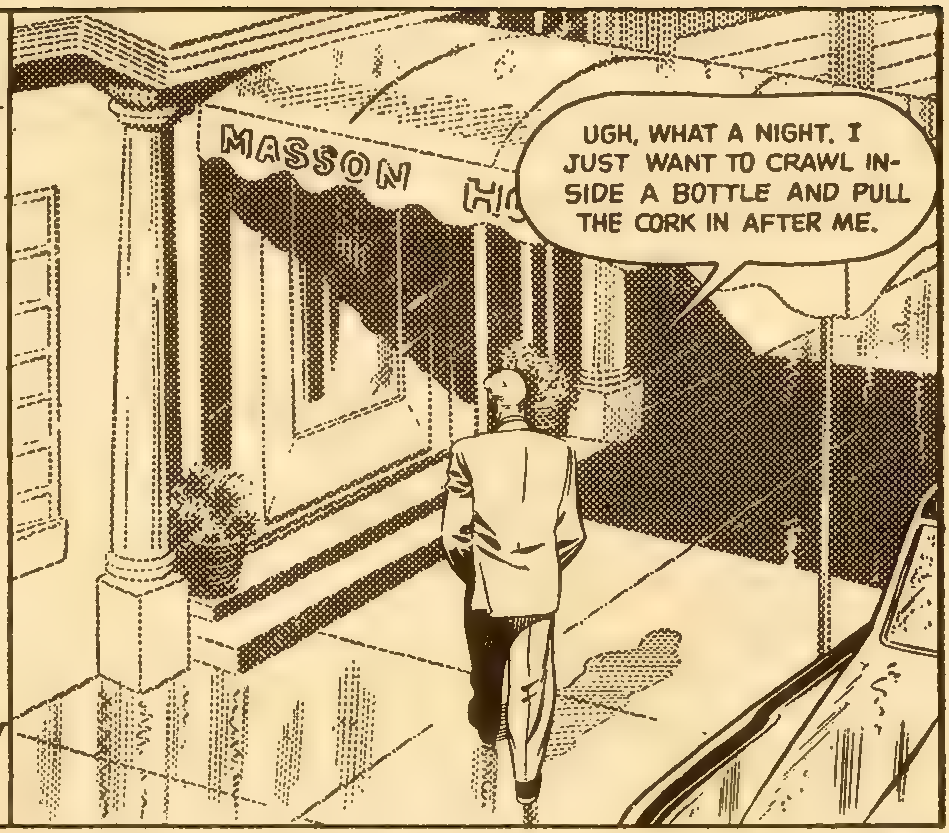

HOP IN, JIMMY, WHAT KEEPS YOU OUT SO LATE AT NIGHT?
GEE, THANKS, MR. WEBER. DAD'S A NIGHT WATCHMAN AT THE BANK AND HE FORGOT HIS LUNCHBOX. SO I DROPPED IT OFF FOR HIM
YOU'RE A NICE KID, JIMMY. I'M GLAD THERE'S ONE GOOD PERSON IN THIS TOWN.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, ONE GOOD PERSON, MR. WEBER?
NOTHING, JIMMY. I GUESS I'M JUST A LITTLE ANGRY AT MYSELF TONIGHT NOT ANGRY... DISGUSTED.
HUH? BUT GOSH, MR. WEBER, YOU'RE THE NICEST GUY I KNOW ...OUTSIDE OF MY DAD, THAT IS.
BUS STOP

WHY, YOU STARTED THE COPPER CITY BOY'S CLUB, AND THAT'S THE SWELLEST BREAK THE KIDS EVER HAD. HONEST.
WELL, I'M GLAD I WAS GOOD FOR SOMETHING.

YOU'RE TEACHING THE KIDS WHAT DEMOCRACY AND FAIR PLAY REALLY MEAN. NO KIDDING.
HA! "HAL WEBER, INSTRUCTOR IN FAIR PLAY!" THAT'S A GREAT LAUGH. WELL, HERE'S YOUR HOUSE, JIMMY.

AS HE WATCHED JIMMY BOUND UP THE FRONT STEPS, HAL'S MIND SHOT BACK TWENTY YEARS TO ANOTHER YOUNG BOY WHO TALKED OF FAIR PLAY AND DREAMED OF BEING A NEW JEFFERSON, A LINCOLN THE BOY HAL WEBER HAD ONCE BEEN
DREAM YOUR DREAMS WHILE YOU CAN, YOUNG FELLOW. SOME DAY YOU'LL HAVE TO WAKE UP AND FIND THAT THERE ARE MEN LIKE JEFFERS IN THIS WORLD... AND WOMEN LIKE RUST MASSON. THEN YOU'LL NEED THOSE DREAMS.

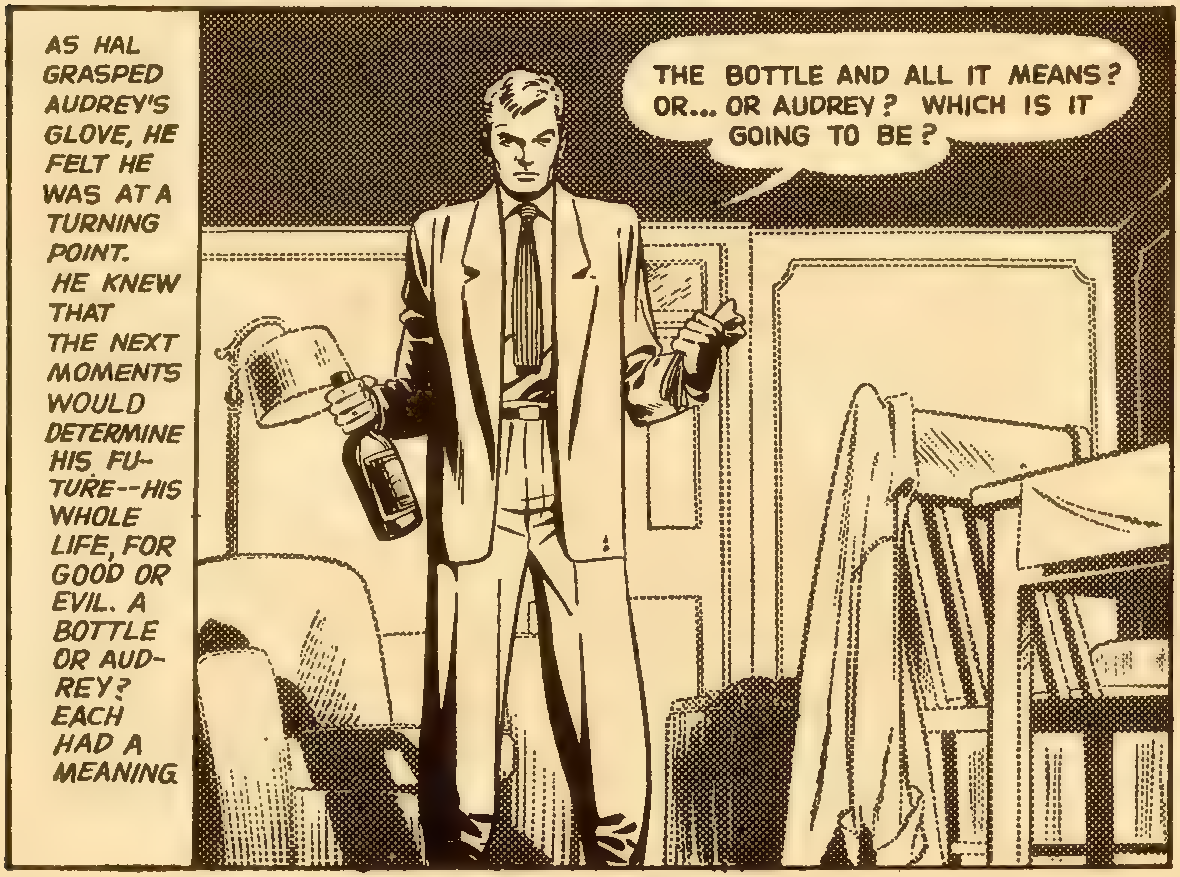
HAL PULLED HIMSELF OUT OF HIS REVERIE. HE DROVE QUICKLY TO HIS HOTEL AND THE ESCAPE THAT A WAITING SHOT OF WHISKEY OFFERED HIM. HE WANTED TO FORGET TONIGHT-- THE NIGHT OF HIS DOWNFALL. TOMORROW WOULD BE DIFFERENT. HE'D START OUT AFRESH ON A STRAIGHT PATH--- TOMORROW.



WHAT WERE THE CONGRATULATIONS FOR? DID YOU COVER A GOOD STORY TONIGHT, SIR?
NO! MATTER OF FACT, IT WAS THE WORST ASSIGNMENT OF MY LIFE...

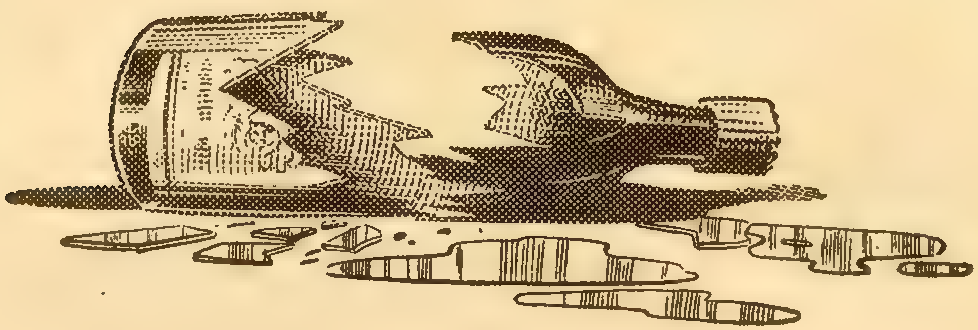
I'M ASHAMED OF MYSELF. I DON'T REALLY WANT TO WORK FOR RUST— AND YET WHEN I'M WITH HER EVERYTHING SEEMS ALL RIGHT. I'LL NEED MY POCKET KNIFE TO OPEN THIS BOTTLE. NOW WHERE DID I...? WHAT'S THIS!

AUDREY'S GLOVE! I MUST HAVE PICKED IT UP AND PUT IT IN MY POCKET UNCONSCIOUSLY. AND NOW HERE, IN THIS ROOM, IT'S LIKE A SMALL PART OF HER; WARM AND SOFT TO THE TOUCH Ooo.


AS HAL GRASPED AUDREY'S GLOVE, HE FELT HE WAS AT A TURNING POINT. HE KNEW THAT THE NEXT MOMENTS WOULD DETERMINE HIS FUTURE--HIS WHOLE LIFE, FOR GOOD OR EVIL. A BOTTLE OR AUDREY? EACH HAD A MEANING
THE BOTTLE AND ALL IT MEANS? OR... OR AUDREY? WHICH IS IT GOING TO BE?

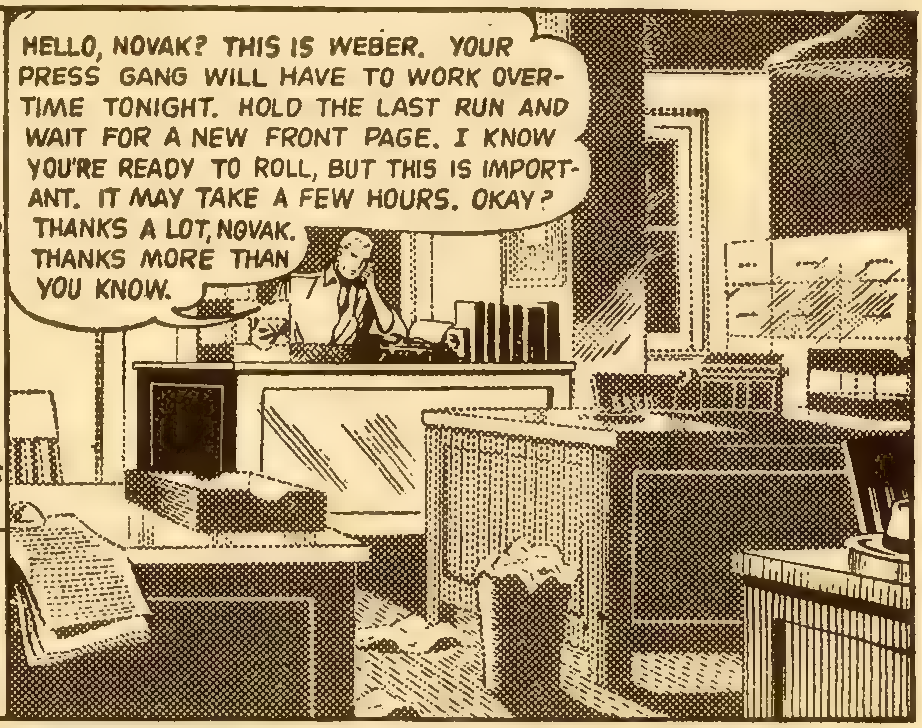
TONIGHT AUDREY GAVE ME UP AS A HUMAN BEING. BUT I'M NOT LICKED... A MAN CAN BE HIS OWN MASTER AS LONG AS HE HAS THE STRENGTH TO SMASH HIS CHAINS.
AUDREY'S GLOVE IN THE ONE HAND AND A BOTTLE IN THE OTHER. THEY'RE SYMBOLS, MR. WEBER. TAKE YOUR CHOICE.
YES! BY THE GOD THAT MADE ME, I'LL BE A FREE MAN AGAIN... IF ONLY FOR TONIGHT!

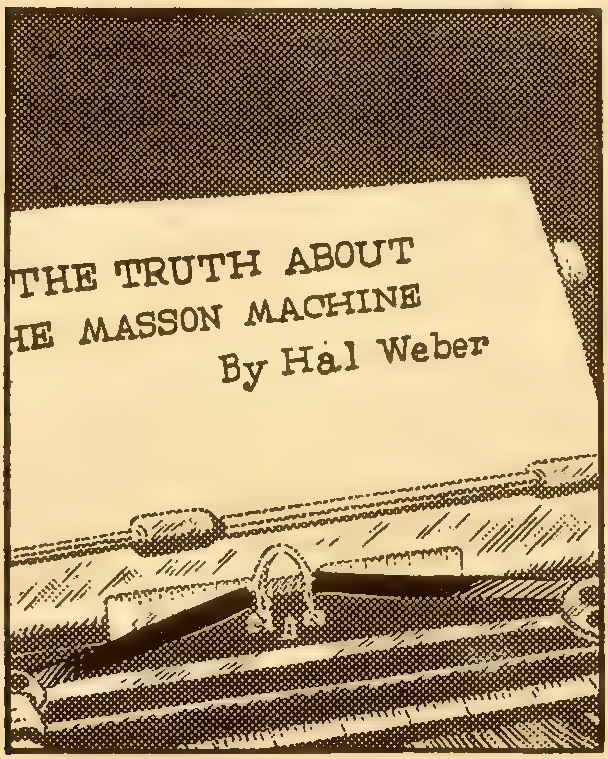
I'M GOING TO WORK BY MORNING MORE THAN A MIRROR WILL BE SMASHED IN COPPER CITY!

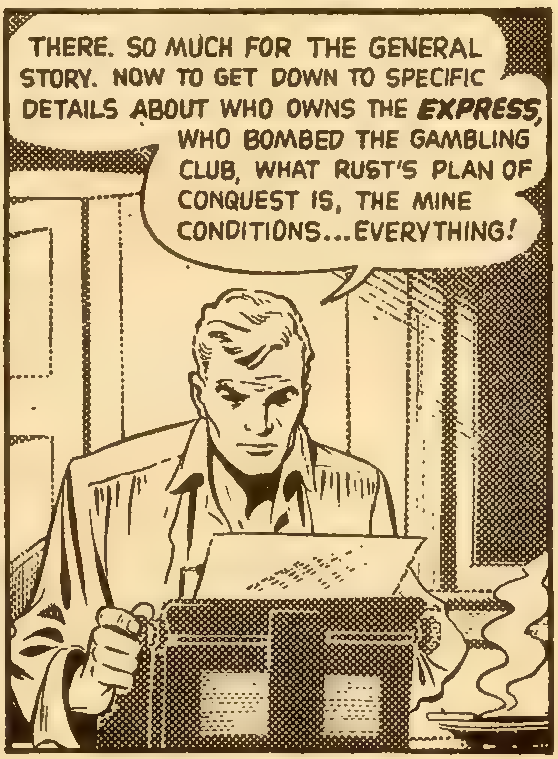


# CHAPTER 5 The COUNTERPLOT

AS THE CLOCK ROUNDED MIDNIGHT AND STARTED THE LONG HAUL TO DAWN, HAL WEBER HUNCHED TENSELY OVER HIS TYPEWRITER IN THE DESERTED CITY ROOM OF THE **EXPRESS**. HE WORKED QUICKLY, AND AS CALMLY AS HE COULD ON WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT STORY OF HIS LIFE.


HELLO, NOVAK? THIS IS WEBER. YOUR PRESS GANG WILL HAVE TO WORK OVERTIME TONIGHT. HOLD THE LAST RUN AND WAIT FOR A NEW FRONT PAGE. I KNOW YOU'RE READY TO ROLL, BUT THIS IS IMPORTANT. IT MAY TAKE A FEW HOURS. OKAY?
THANKS A LOT, NOVAK. THANKS MORE THAN YOU KNOW.

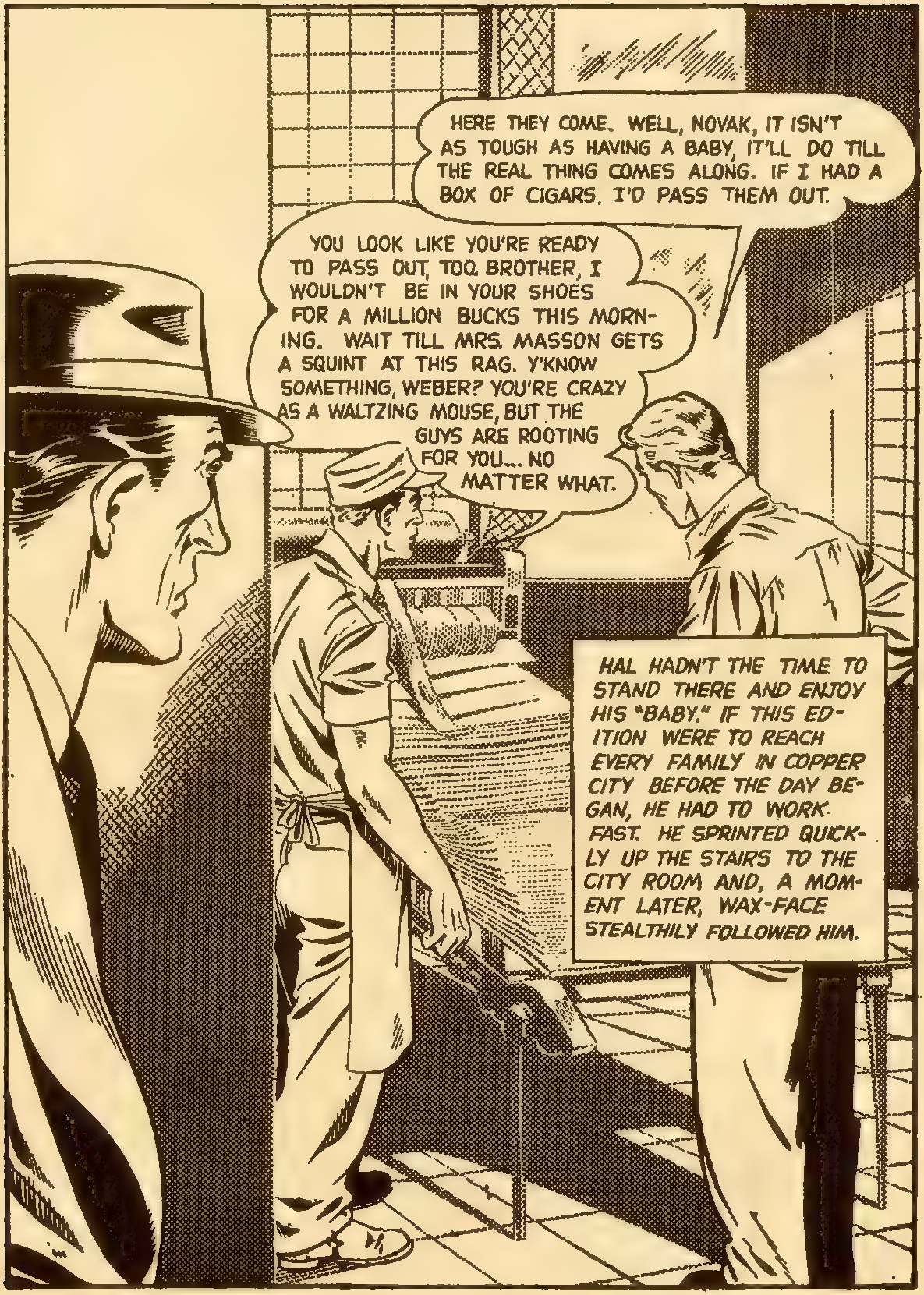




THERE. SO MUCH FOR THE GENERAL STORY. NOW TO GET DOWN TO SPECIFIC DETAILS ABOUT WHO OWNS THE **EXPRESS**, WHO BOMBED THE GAMBLING CLUB, WHAT RUST'S PLAN OF CONQUEST IS, THE MINE CONDITIONS...EVERYTHING!

FASTER, WEBER, MUCH FASTER. YOU'VE BEEN AT THIS TWO HOURS AND YOU'VE STILL GOT TO COVER THE TIE-UP BETWEEN RUST AND THAT BIG LUMBER COMPANY DOWNSTATE.
HEY, WEBER, WE'VE GOT MOST OF THE STUFF SET UP. BOY, WILL IT KNOCK THEIR EYES OUT! YOU GOT THE LAST FOLLOW-UP COPY?
HERE IT IS, MIKE. SEE HOW FAST YOU CAN GET IT SET UP.
SAY, YOU DON'T LEAVE NOTHING UNCOVERED, DO YOU, WEBER? I FIGURE THERE ISN'T ONE PIECE OF DIRTY WORK YOU HAVEN'T EXPOSED!
THE WORST THING FOR MY MONEY, IS HAVING TO TELL OUR READERS WHO REALLY OWNS US. BUT MAYBE THAT'LL SHOW THEM HOW THEY'VE BEEN ROOKED.
UNKNOWN TO MIKE OR HAL, A WAXY-FACED MAN PEERED CAUTIOUSLY AROUND THE EDGE OF THE DOOR. HIS FLAT, PALE EYES WATCHING -- HIS ALERT EARS RECORDING EVERY WORD OF THEIR CONVERSATIONS.

"...BY HAL WEBER, EXPRESS EDITOR IN CHIEF." WELL, I'LL PROBABLY GET SHOT IN THE MORNING, BUT RIGHT NOW I'M HAVING THE TIME OF MY LIFE. HEY, WALLY, HOW ARE THE PAGES COMING?
YOU KNOW, WALLY, I FEEL AS THOUGH I'D BOUGHT BACK MY SOUL FROM THE DEVIL, AND THE PRICE WASN'T HIGH ... JUST A LOT OF WORK.
HUH? LOOK, I AIN'T GOT TIME TO CHIN, WEBER. I'M GOING TO PULL A PROOF OF THE FRONT PAGE.
THERE YOU ARE. LOOK OKAY?
IT LOOKS FINE, WALLY JUST FINE IT'S THE BEST FRONT PAGE I EVER SAW IN MY WHOLE LIFE. NOW SEE HOW FAST YOU CAN GET IT ON THE PRESS.
COPPER CITY EXPRESS
WHO REALLY OWNS THE EXPRESS?
Who Paid Murderers To Bomb Jeffers Club?
THE TEMPO OF THE WORK POUNDED THROUGH HAL'S BLOOD LIKE THE DRUMTHROB OF AN ADVANCING ARMY. THERE WAS DANGER, YET, IF HE'D DONE HIS WORK WELL, THE PEOPLE OF COPPER CITY WOULD SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE LIVED IN DANGER AGAIN. BUT THE NIGHT WAS NOT OVER, AND THE THIN, WAXY-FACED MAN STILL SNOOPED AROUND TRYING TO FIND OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON...

THERE'S YOUR MAT, WEBER. STOP WORRYING. WE'LL GET IT OUT OKAY
CAN'T STOP WORRYING YOU'D THINK THIS WAS THE FIRST EDITION I'D EVER PUT TO BED
MAYBE IT'S THE MOST HONEST ONE, EH, WEBER?
THE PLATE'S OKAY. WHY DON'T YOU GO BOTHER SOMEBODY ELSE WEBER?
SORRY. I JUST WANT TO GET THIS EDITION ON THE STREETS BEFORE ANYBODY KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENED. GUYS WITH GUNS MIGHT BE AROUND TO STOP US.
YOU'RE SURE THAT'S GOING IN RIGHT, NOVAK? WE CAN'T AFFORD ANY SLIP-UPS.
LOOK, WEBER, I DON'T TELL YOU HOW TO WRITE, DO I? NOW BE NICE AND LEAVE US ALONE. YOU'RE WORSE THAN AN EXPECTANT FATHER.
OKAY, CLANCY! LET HER ROLL!


HERE THEY COME. WELL, NOVAK, IT ISN'T AS TOUGH AS HAVING A BABY, IT'LL DO TILL THE REAL THING COMES ALONG. IF I HAD A BOX OF CIGARS, I'D PASS THEM OUT.
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'RE READY TO PASS OUT, TOO, BROTHER, I WOULDN'T BE IN YOUR SHOES FOR A MILLION BUCKS THIS MORNING. WAIT TILL MRS. MASSON GETS A SQUINT AT THIS RAG. Y'KNOW SOMETHING, WEBER? YOU'RE CRAZY AS A WALTZING MOUSE, BUT THE GUYS ARE ROOTING FOR YOU... NO MATTER WHAT.
HAL HADN'T THE TIME TO STAND THERE AND ENJOY HIS "BABY." IF THIS EDITION WERE TO REACH EVERY FAMILY IN COPPER CITY BEFORE THE DAY BEGAN, HE HAD TO WORK FAST. HE SPRINTED QUICKLY UP THE STAIRS TO THE CITY ROOM AND, A MOMENT LATER, WAX-FACE STEALTHILY FOLLOWED HIM.

HELLO, JIMMY? SORRY TO WAKE YOU UP, KID, BUT THIS IS URGENT. CAN YOU HOP ON YOUR BIKE AND GET DOWN TO THE EXPRESS OFFICE FAST? ON THE WAY, STOP BY FOR SOME OF THE OTHER GUYS IN THE ATHLETIC CLUB... GUYS WITH BIKES. I'LL PHONE THE REST OF THEM. I NEED YOU BADLY, JIMMY... ALL OF YOU.

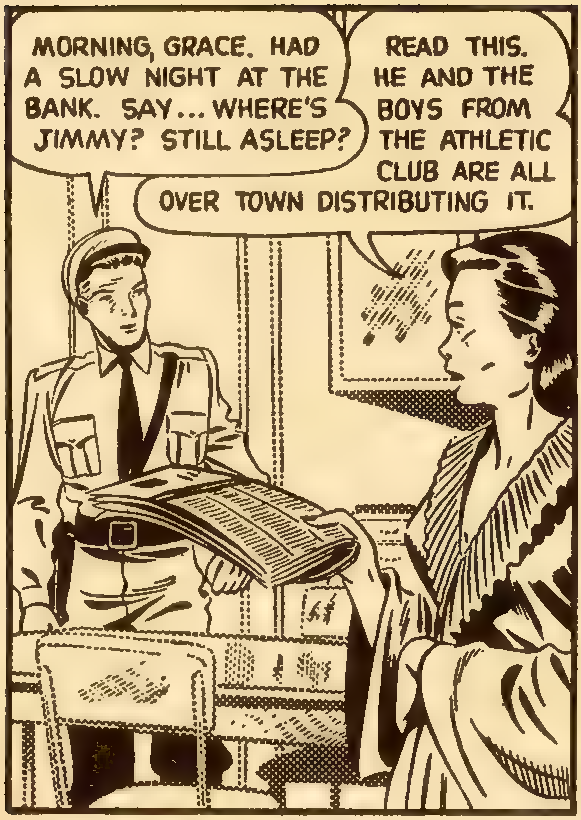
DRIVER, TAKE ME TO THE MASSON HOME AND MAKE IT FAST! IT'S A MATTER OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE. STEP ON IT!

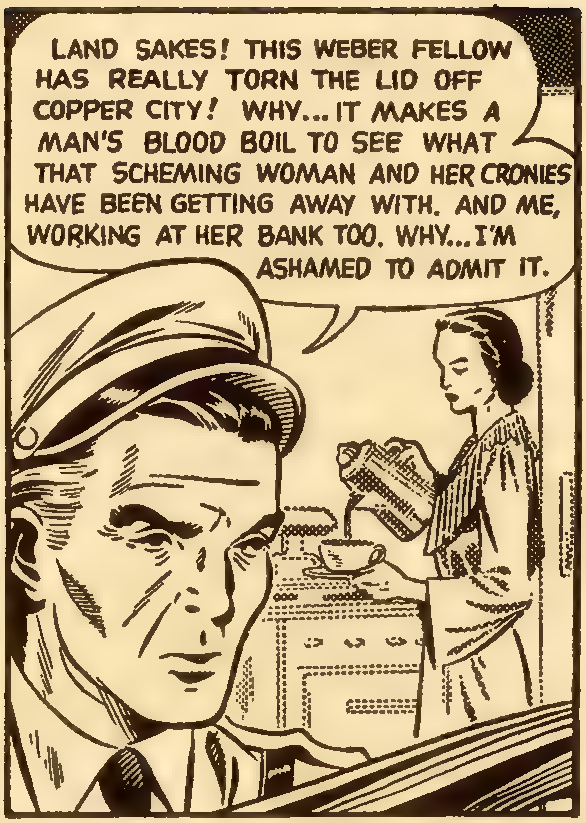
WHAT ON EARTH? JIMMY, DO YOU REALIZE IT'S ONLY FIVE THIRTY? IF YOU WERE GOING TO SCHOOL I COULDN'T BUDGE YOU OUT OF BED THIS EARLY WITH A CROWBAR.
IMPORTANT STUFF, MOM. MR. WEBER NEEDS ME. HE DIDN'T SAY FOR WHAT, BUT ANYTHING HE WANTS IS OKAY WITH ME.

HEY, JIMMY, WHAT'S ALL THE SHOUTING FOR?
COME ON, FATSO! HOP ON YOUR BIKE AND GET DOWN TO THE EXPRESS OFFICE. MR. WEBER NEEDS YOU ...AND FAST!

HERE'S THE STORY, BOYS. WE HAVE TO GET A COPY OF THIS EXTRA ON THE DOORSTEP OF EVERY HOUSE IN COPPER CITY. IT'S FREE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO COLLECT FOR IT. WHEN YOU READ THE PAPER YOU'LL KNOW IT'S VERY IMPORTANT. NOW IT'S SIX O'CLOCK. THINK YOU CAN FINISH THE JOB BY EIGHT?
YOU BET!
LET'S GET GOIN'!
SURE ENOUGH, MR. WEBER.
UH... WE AIN'T MEMBERS OF THE CLUB, BUT WE'D LIKE TO HELP. I'M PAT O'ROURKE AND THIS HERE'S SAM KLEIN. HOW ABOUT IT?
SURE! YOU TWO TAKE THE EAST SIDE. THERE ARE APARTMENT HOUSES OVER THERE. MAKE CERTAIN YOU GET A COPY TO EACH APARTMENT. NOW... SCOOT!
OKAY, STUDSY, GET THIS LOAD ON THE 6:32 TRAIN. THEN COVER THE NEWSTANDS.
HEY, HAL... HELLO! AM I SEEING THINGS, OR DID YOU REALLY DO IT!
EXPRESS

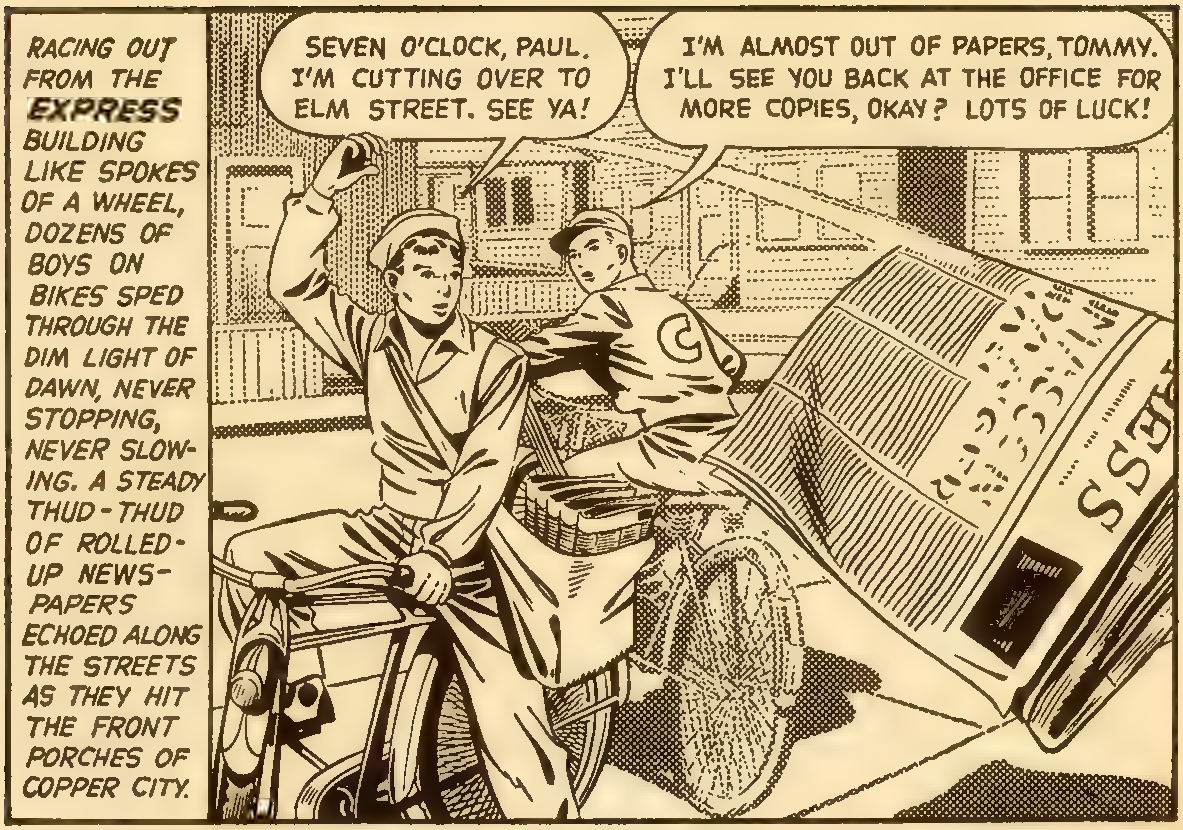
LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE COVERED EVERYTHING. YOU MUST BE BUSHED!
HOWDY, SONNY! I JUST PICKED ONE O' THEM JOURNALISTIC BOMBSHELLS YOUR BOYS ARE PASSIN' AROUND. CONGRATS, BUB!
BUT THAT AIN'T THE ONLY THING I PICKED UP, LADDYBOY. LITTLE WHILE BACK SOME WISPY GENT HAILED MY HACK AND WANTED TO GIT TO THE MASSON ABODE PRONTO. SEEMS AS IF HE HAD SOMETHIN' URGENT TO WHISPER IN RUST'S EAR.
WHAT? HOW LONG AGO?
HAL'S HEART JUMPED WILDLY. HAD THE INFORMER GOTTEN TO RUST ALREADY? EVEN NOW ARMED MOBS OF HER HOODLUMS MIGHT BE CRUISING THE STREETS PICKING UP HAL'S BOYS. HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KIDS' SAFETY. WHAT HAD HE SENT THEM INTO? QUICKLY HE FOLLOWED THE SPRY OLD MAN OUT TO HIS CAB
HE LOOKS SO PEACEFUL. LET HIM DREAM.
THIS HERE JASPER WAS IN TOO MUCH OF A HURRY FOR HIS HEALTH. I KINDA CALMED HIM DOWN WITH THIS PACIFYIN' MONKEY-WRENCH I KEEP HANDY. HE'LL SLEEP RIGHT PEACEFUL TILL THE REST OF YOUR PAPERS IS DELIVERED.


MORNING, GRACE. HAD A SLOW NIGHT AT THE BANK. SAY... WHERE'S JIMMY? STILL ASLEEP?
READ THIS. HE AND THE BOYS FROM THE ATHLETIC CLUB ARE ALL OVER TOWN DISTRIBUTING IT.

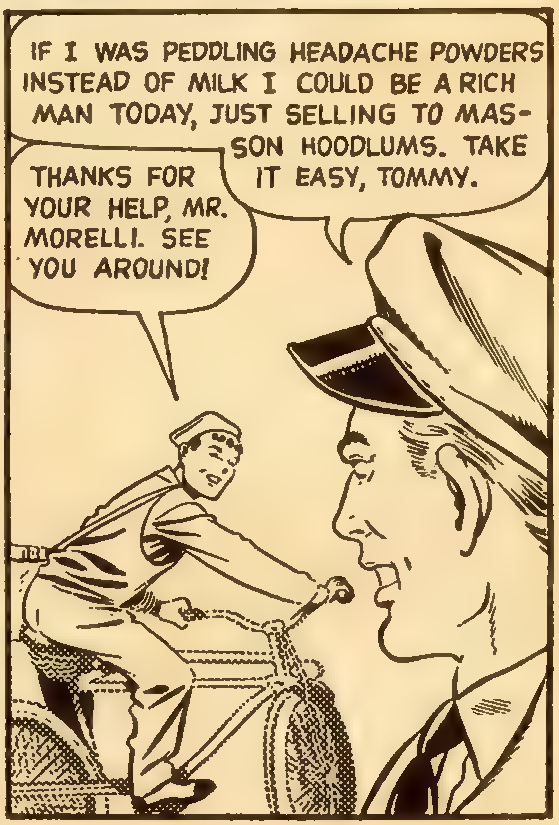

LAND SAKES! THIS WEBER FELLOW HAS REALLY TORN THE LID OFF COPPER CITY! WHY... IT MAKES A MAN'S BLOOD BOIL TO SEE WHAT THAT SCHEMING WOMAN AND HER CRONIES HAVE BEEN GETTING AWAY WITH. AND ME, WORKING AT HER BANK TOO. WHY... I'M ASHAMED TO ADMIT IT.

WAIT TILL THE BOYS AT THE MINE READ THIS, MARTHA. I TELL YOU IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A PAPER IN TOWN THAT TELLS THE TRUTH AND STICKS UP FOR PEOPLE LIKE US.
BILL... DON'T DO ANYTHING FOOLISH. WE'VE GOT ENOUGH TROUBLE WITHOUT ANYMORE AT THE MINES.

WH-WHAT! THE EXPRESS SAID THAT? WE'VE GOT TO RUSH OUT AN EXTRA THIS MINUTE AND DENY EVERY WORD!


RACING OUT FROM THE EXPRESS BUILDING LIKE SPOKES OF A WHEEL, DOZENS OF BOYS ON BIKES SPED THROUGH THE DIM LIGHT OF DAWN, NEVER STOPPING, NEVER SLOWING. A STEADY THUD-THUD OF ROLLED-UP NEWSPAPERS ECHOED ALONG THE STREETS AS THEY HIT THE FRONT PORCHES OF COPPER CITY.
SEVEN O'CLOCK, PAUL. I'M CUTTING OVER TO ELM STREET. SEE YA!
I'M ALMOST OUT OF PAPERS, TOMMY. I'LL SEE YOU BACK AT THE OFFICE FOR MORE COPIES, OKAY? LOTS OF LUCK!

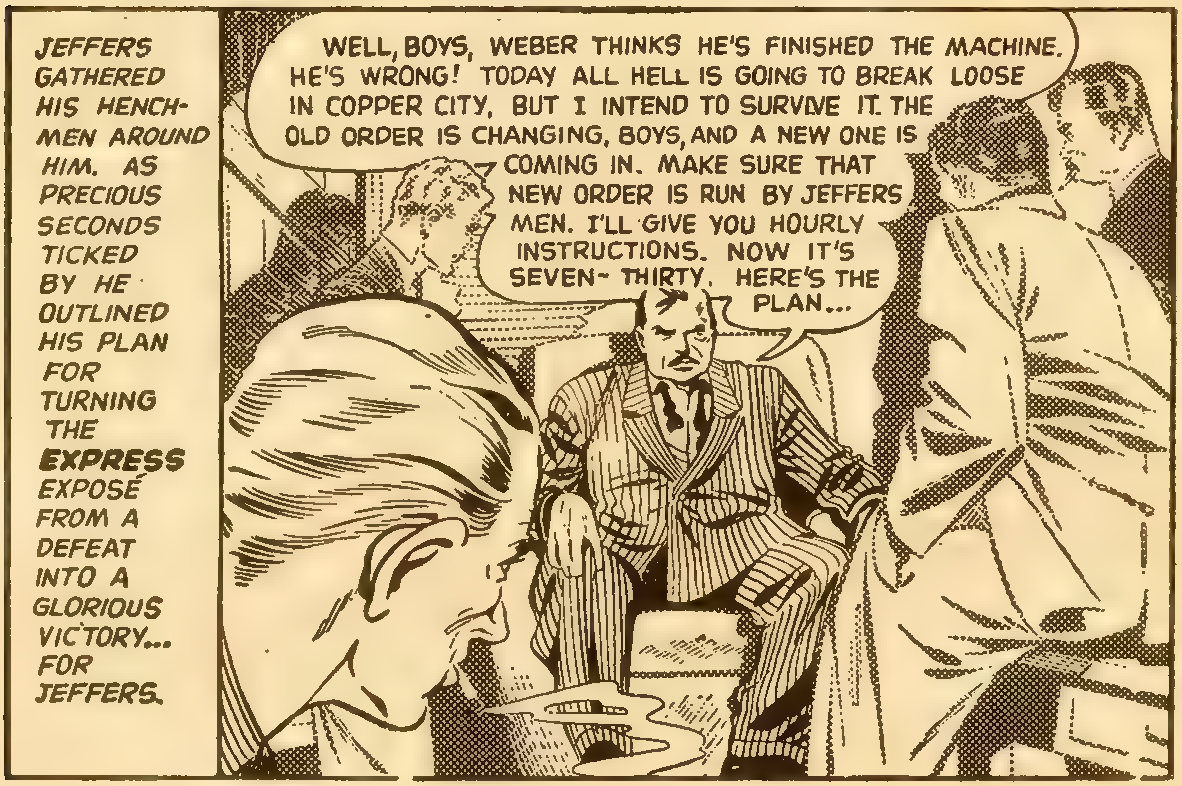
HI, THERE, MR. MORELLI. DIDJA GET YOUR COPY OF THIS MORNING'S EXPRESS?
SURE DID, AND IT'S JUST WHAT COPPER CITY NEEDED. TELL YOU WHAT: SUPPOSE I TAKE SOME COPIES WITH ME. I'M GOING OUT INTO THE COUNTRY A FEW MILES. I'LL DROP OFF PAPERS AT THE OUTLYING HOUSES.


IF I WAS PEDDLING HEADACHE POWDERS INSTEAD OF MILK I COULD BE A RICH MAN TODAY, JUST SELLING TO MASSON HOODLUMS. TAKE IT EASY, TOMMY.
THANKS FOR YOUR HELP, MR. MORELLI. SEE YOU AROUND!

HEY, THERE! LOOK OUT! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU, MISTER?
STOP! FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, STOP! I'M INJURED PLEASE STOP!
DAIRY MILK
THANKS, FRIEND Y-YOU WON'T REGRET THIS ACT OF MERCY. BUT... BUT... WHAT ARE THOSE HEADLINES? WHAT'S HAPPENED?
LOOKS LIKE RUST MASSON AND HER GANG OF THIEVES ARE GETTING WHAT'S COMING TO THEM BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
YOUR FACE IS SO CHEWED UP I CAN'T TELL. BOY... YOU MUST HAVE BEEN ON A REAL BENDER LAST NIGHT.
WHAT'S THIS? "THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MASSON EMPIRE?" GOOD LORD, WEBER'S GONE STARK, RAVING MAD! HE'LL NEVER LIVE THROUGH IT!

A COUPLE OF CUPS OF GOOD BLACK COFFEE WILL MAKE YOU FEEL A LOT BETTER, PAL.
I'LL NEVER BE MORE SOBER. LOOK— A MINE TRUCK GOING BACK TO TOWN. LET ME OFF HERE. I'LL FLAG A RIDE BACK. I'VE GOT TO ATTEND TO SOME... SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN COPPER CITY.

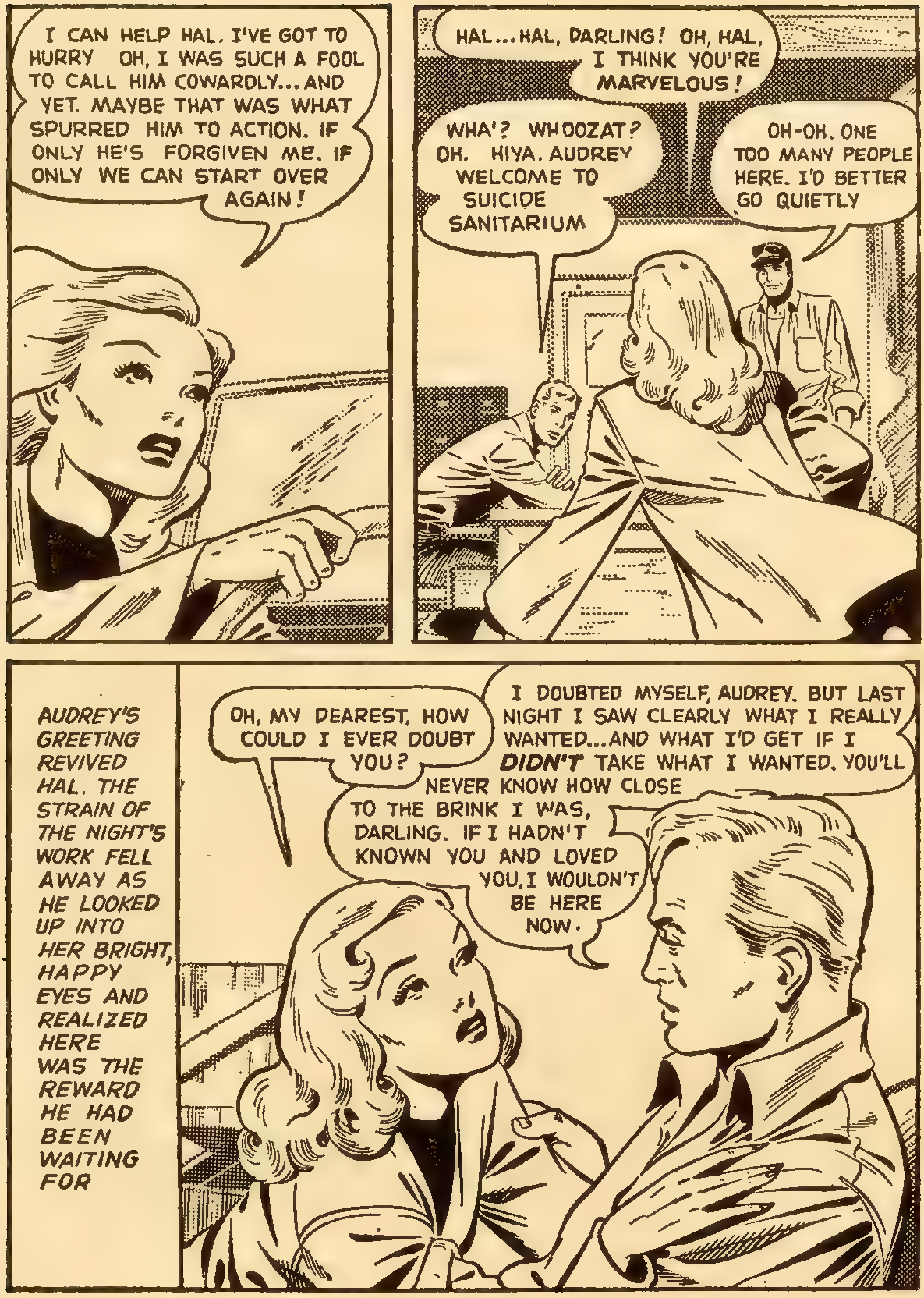
HERE YOU ARE, MR. JEFFERS. SHOULDN'T YOU CALL A DOCTOR?
LATER, LATER. HMM... THE RUINS OF THE HAPPY HOUR CLUB. WELL, THEY'RE AS GOOD A BASE TO START OPERATIONS AS ARE ANYTHING ELSE TODAY. I HOPE THE BOYS ARE WAITING NEXT DOOR.

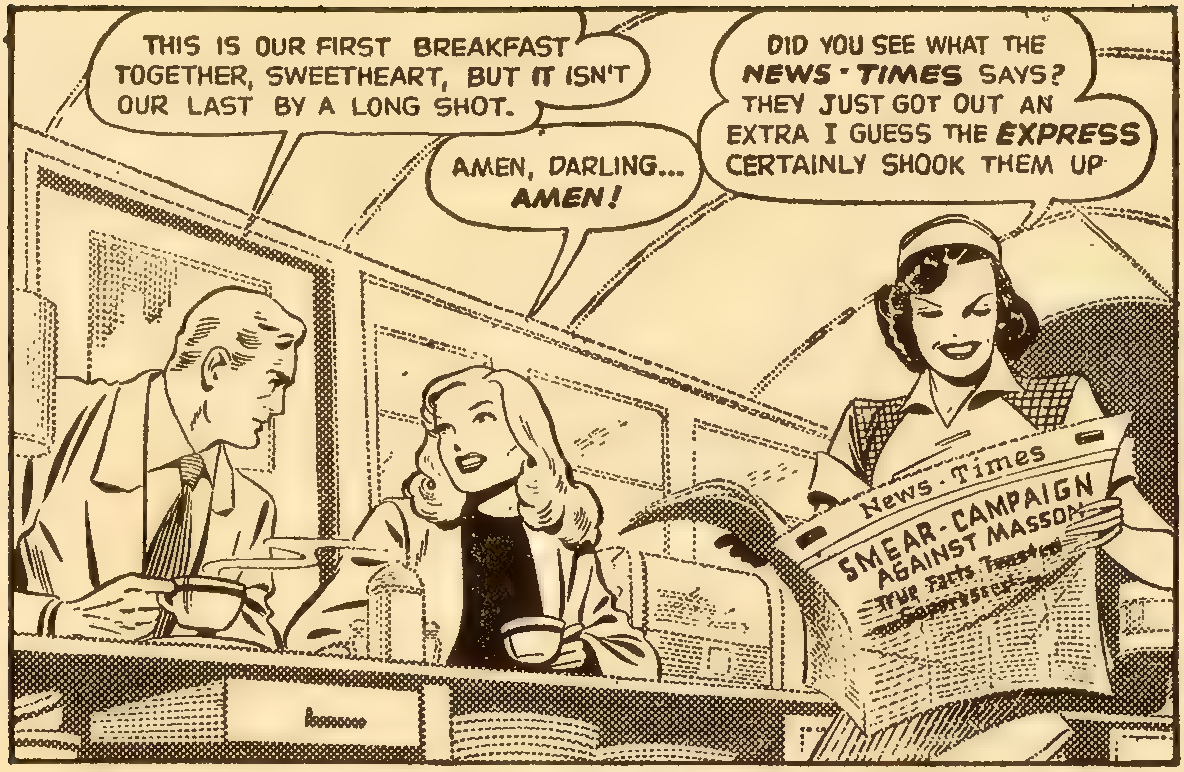

JEFFERS GATHERED HIS HENCHMEN AROUND HIM. AS PRECIOUS SECONDS TICKED BY HE OUTLINED HIS PLAN FOR TURNING THE EXPRESS EXPOSÉ FROM A DEFEAT INTO A GLORIOUS VICTORY... FOR JEFFERS.
WELL, BOYS, WEBER THINKS HE'S FINISHED THE MACHINE. HE'S WRONG! TODAY ALL HELL IS GOING TO BREAK LOOSE IN COPPER CITY, BUT I INTEND TO SURVIVE IT. THE OLD ORDER IS CHANGING, BOYS, AND A NEW ONE IS COMING IN. MAKE SURE THAT NEW ORDER IS RUN BY JEFFERS MEN. I'LL GIVE YOU HOURLY INSTRUCTIONS. NOW IT'S SEVEN-THIRTY. HERE'S THE PLAN...

MEAN-WHILE, THE MILKMAN CONTINUED HIS RURAL ROUTE, AND AT EACH STOP DELIVERED A COPY OF THE EXPRESS — THE STRONGEST EXPLOSIVE COPPER CITY HAD EVER WITNESSED.
HELLO, THERE! YOU'RE A LITTLE LATE THIS MORNING, AREN'T YOU?
I SURE AM, MISS MASSON. I TOOK ON AN EXTRA JOB THIS MORNING. GET YOUR COPY OF THE HOTTEST THING IN TOWN, THE EXPRESS. AND IT'S ABSOLUTELY FREE.. COURTESY OF THE EDITOR.

HAL... OH, HAL! HE DID IT! I WAS SO WRONG ABOUT HIM... SO VERY WRONG. BUT NOW THAT HE'S DONE IT, HIS LIFE IS IN DANGER.
I DON'T KNOW, MISS. THE TOWN'S BUZZING LIKE A HIVE OF BEES. IF ANYBODY'S LIFE'S IN DANGER, IT'S YOUR... YOUR STEPMOTHER'S.
DAIRY

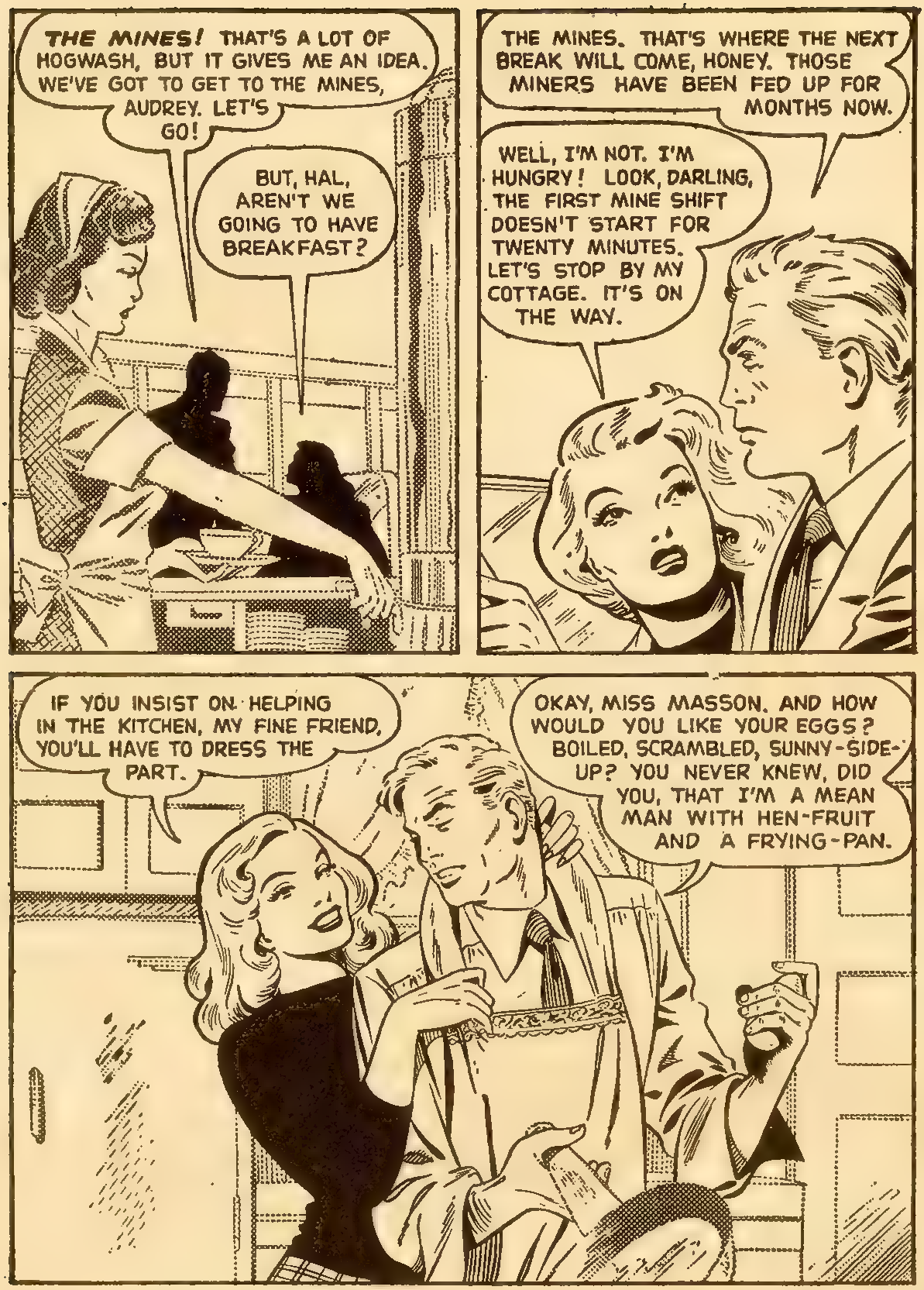
THEY DON'T KNOW RUST. SHE'S INSANE, WILD FOR POWER. A THING LIKE THIS CAN SHAKE HER, BUT IT CAN'T STOP HER. SHE'S GOT THE TASTE OF POWER NOW AND IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN THIS TO FINISH THE MASSON EMPIRE. BUT I'M AFRAID THERE'S NOTHING MORE HAL CAN DO. IT'S OUT OF HIS HANDS NOW.

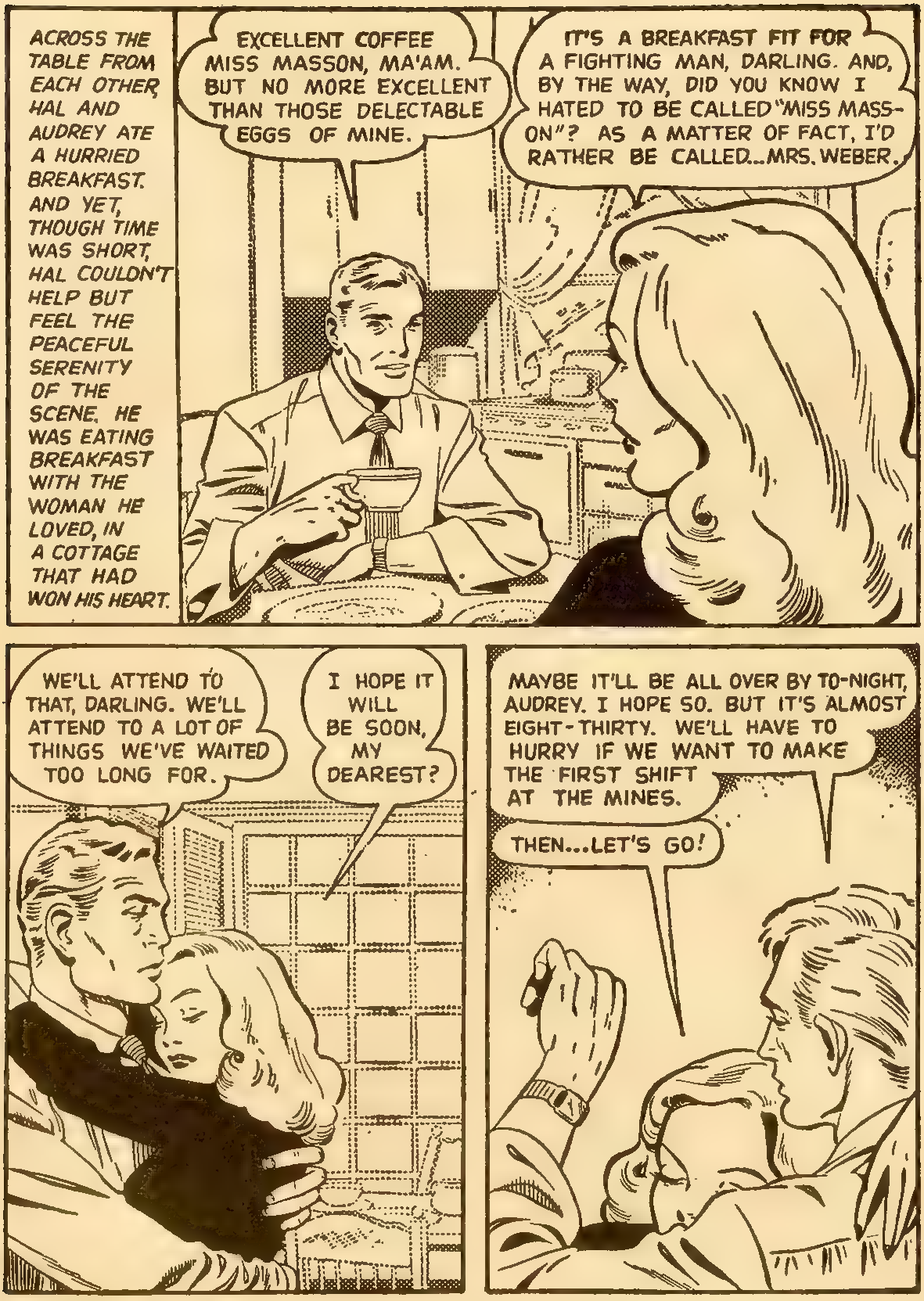

I CAN HELP HAL. I'VE GOT TO HURRY OH, I WAS SUCH A FOOL TO CALL HIM COWARDLY... AND YET. MAYBE THAT WAS WHAT SPURRED HIM TO ACTION. IF ONLY HE'S FORGIVEN ME. IF ONLY WE CAN START OVER AGAIN!
HAL... HAL, DARLING! OH, HAL, I THINK YOU'RE MARVELOUS!
WHA'? WHOOZAT? OH. HIYA. AUDREY WELCOME TO SUICIDE SANITARIUM
OH-OH. ONE TOO MANY PEOPLE HERE. I'D BETTER GO QUIETLY
AUDREY'S GREETING REVIVED HAL. THE STRAIN OF THE NIGHT'S WORK FELL AWAY AS HE LOOKED UP INTO HER BRIGHT, HAPPY EYES AND REALIZED HERE WAS THE REWARD HE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR
OH, MY DEAREST, HOW COULD I EVER DOUBT YOU?
I DOUBTED MYSELF, AUDREY. BUT LAST NIGHT I SAW CLEARLY WHAT I REALLY WANTED... AND WHAT I'D GET IF I DIDN'T TAKE WHAT I WANTED. YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW CLOSE TO THE BRINK I WAS, DARLING. IF I HADN'T KNOWN YOU AND LOVED YOU, I WOULDN'T BE HERE NOW.


THIS IS OUR FIRST BREAKFAST TOGETHER, SWEETHEART, BUT IT ISN'T OUR LAST BY A LONG SHOT.
AMEN, DARLING... AMEN!
DID YOU SEE WHAT THE NEWS-TIMES SAYS? THEY JUST GOT OUT AN EXTRA I GUESS THE EXPRESS CERTAINLY SHOOK THEM UP
News-Times
SMEAR-CAMPAIGN AGAINST MASSON
True Facts Twisted Suppressed...

OUR COMPETITION IS HAVING A FIT. LOOK AT THEM SQUIRM! BUT THEY'LL HAVE TO WRIGGLE HARDER THAN THIS.
News Times
SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST MASSON INDUSTRIES
True Facts Twiste
Suppressed...

LISTEN TO THIS, AUDREY: "THE WHOLE EXPRESS STORY IS A FABRIC OF CHEAP, MALICIOUS LYING. IF EVEN ONE TENTH OF WHAT IS SAID ABOUT MINE CONDITIONS IS ACTUALLY TRUE, THEN THE MINERS SHOULD QUIT AND NEVER ENTER THE MINES AGAIN. BUT WE KNOW THEY WON'T BECAUSE THE CHARGES ARE COMPLETELY FALSE!"


THE MINES! THAT'S A LOT OF HOGWASH, BUT IT GIVES ME AN IDEA. WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE MINES, AUDREY. LET'S GO!
BUT, HAL, AREN'T WE GOING TO HAVE BREAKFAST?
THE MINES. THAT'S WHERE THE NEXT BREAK WILL COME, HONEY. THOSE MINERS HAVE BEEN FED UP FOR MONTHS NOW.
WELL, I'M NOT. I'M HUNGRY! LOOK, DARLING, THE FIRST MINE SHIFT DOESN'T START FOR TWENTY MINUTES. LET'S STOP BY MY COTTAGE. IT'S ON THE WAY.
IF YOU INSIST ON HELPING IN THE KITCHEN, MY FINE FRIEND, YOU'LL HAVE TO DRESS THE PART.
OKAY, MISS MASSON. AND HOW WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR EGGS? BOILED, SCRAMBLED, SUNNY-SIDE-UP? YOU NEVER KNEW, DID YOU, THAT I'M A MEAN MAN WITH HEN-FRUIT AND A FRYING-PAN.


ACROSS THE TABLE FROM EACH OTHER, HAL AND AUDREY ATE A HURRIED BREAKFAST. AND YET, THOUGH TIME WAS SHORT, HAL COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL THE PEACEFUL SERENITY OF THE SCENE. HE WAS EATING BREAKFAST WITH THE WOMAN HE LOVED, IN A COTTAGE THAT HAD WON HIS HEART.
EXCELLENT COFFEE MISS MASSON, MA'AM. BUT NO MORE EXCELLENT THAN THOSE DELECTABLE EGGS OF MINE.
IT'S A BREAKFAST FIT FOR A FIGHTING MAN, DARLING. AND, BY THE WAY, DID YOU KNOW I HATED TO BE CALLED "MISS MASSON"? AS A MATTER OF FACT, I'D RATHER BE CALLED...MRS. WEBER.
WE'LL ATTEND TO THAT, DARLING. WE'LL ATTEND TO A LOT OF THINGS WE'VE WAITED TOO LONG FOR.
I HOPE IT WILL BE SOON, MY DEAREST?
MAYBE IT'LL BE ALL OVER BY TO-NIGHT, AUDREY. I HOPE SO. BUT IT'S ALMOST EIGHT-THIRTY. WE'LL HAVE TO HURRY IF WE WANT TO MAKE THE FIRST SHIFT AT THE MINES.
THEN...LET'S GO!

ALL RIGHT, MEN, YOU'VE GOT YOUR ORDERS. BUT BE CAREFUL! CHECK WITH ME BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING. I'LL STAY HERE AND HOLD DOWN THE FORT. THIS CAN BE A RED-LETTER DAY FOR US. PLAY IT SMART, PLAY IT CAGEY, AND WE'LL ALL BE IN CLOVER.

BOSS, IS IT SMART TO SPLIT UP ALL THE GUYS? THEY'RE GONNA BE ALL OVER TOWN, AND ONLY US TWO BACK HERE AT HEADQUARTERS.
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THE BANKS, THE STORES, EVERYTHING. DON'T WORRY. WE'VE GOT TO GET AROUND AND LET THE WHOLE TOWN KNOW WE'RE STILL IN POWER.

*MEANWHILE, AT THE MINE HEAD ANOTHER GROUP OF MEN HAD GATHERED, ANGRY MEN, TIRED OF RISKING THEIR LIVES DAILY FOR THE SELFISH WHIM OF A WOMAN WHO DIDN'T CARE WHETHER THEY LIVED OR DIED. THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR ADDRESSED THEM AS THEY WAITED FOR THE 8:30 WHISTLE.*

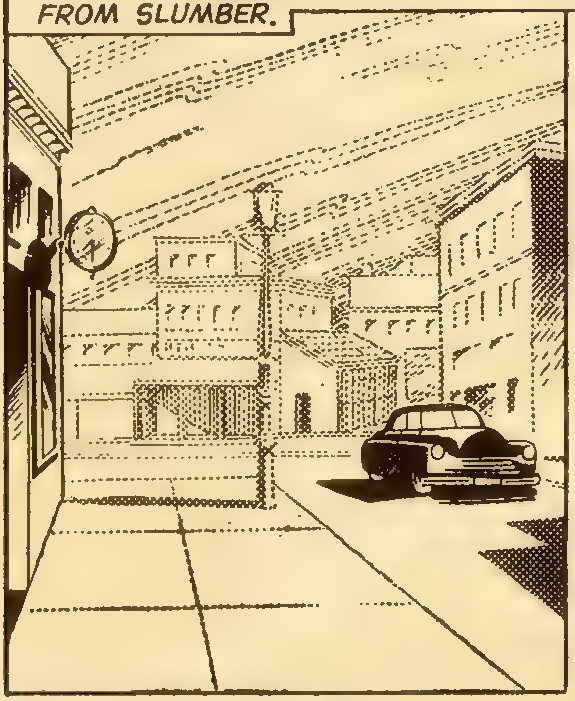
MEN, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. I DON'T BLAME YOU. THOSE MINES ARE UNSAFE. BUT PLEASE DON'T DO ANYTHING ILLEGAL. YOU'RE IN THE RIGHT ONE HUNDRED PER CENT. DON'T DO SOMETHING THAT WILL PUT YOU IN THE WRONG.

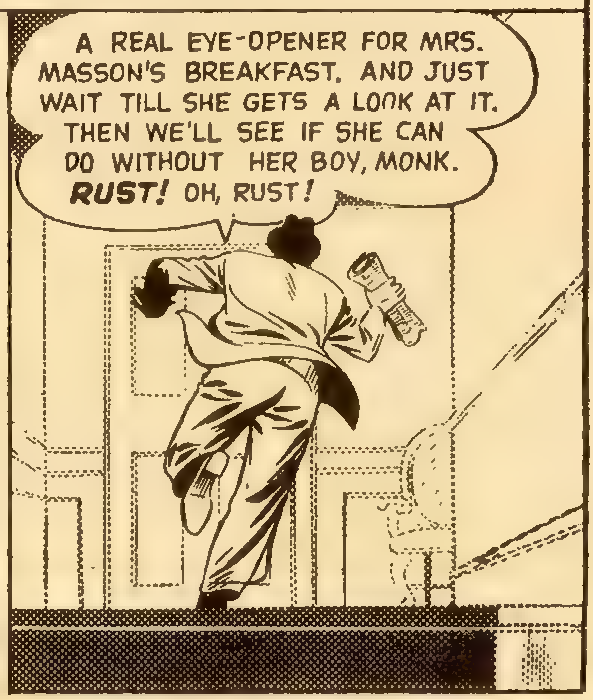
MEN, WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF WE GO DOWN INTO THE PITS TODAY AND SOME OF US ARE KILLED? THERE'LL BE A FRESH CROP OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS IN COPPER CITY, THAT'S WHAT! BUT WAIT! HERE COMES SOMEBODY WHO CAN HELP.
YOU TELL 'EM, WEBER!
THAT'S SHOWIN' 'EM, BOY!
I CAN'T TELL YOU WHAT TO DO, BOYS. I'M NOT A MINER, I'M AN EDITOR. BUT I CAN TELL YOU THIS: THE EYES OF COPPER CITY ARE ON YOU THIS MORNING, BOYS. WHAT YOU DO NOW MAY DECIDE THE FUTURE OF THE WHOLE TOWN... AND RUST MASSON!
THINK HARD, BOYS. YOU'VE GOT THE CHANCE TO SAVE YOURSELVES AND COPPER CITY, TOO. YOU CAN GET RID OF RUST MASSON AND THE CRIMINAL VIOLENCE SHE STANDS FOR. IF YOU HAVE THE GUTS TO STAND UP AND ASSERT YOURSELVES. IF THE MINE ISN'T SAFE TO WORK, DON'T WORK IT. IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOU. SO, WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER? WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?

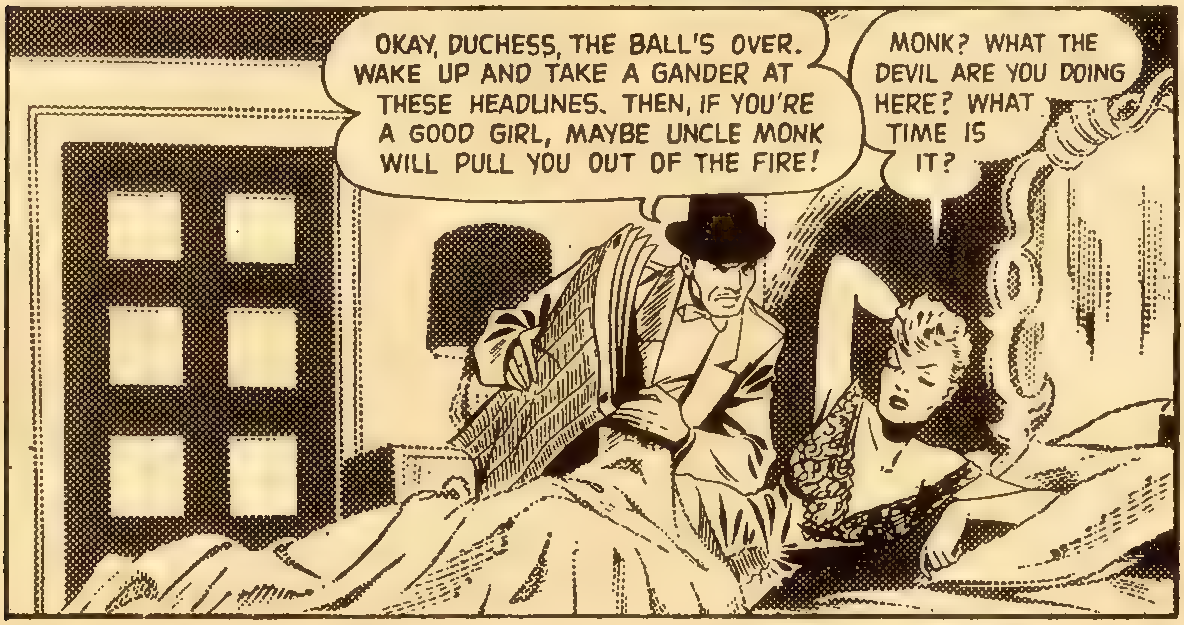
THE WHOLE OF COPPER CITY WAS LIKE A GIGANTIC TIME BOMB THAT TICKED OFF THE SECONDS BEFORE THE TOWN EXPLODED WITH A SCANDAL THAT WOULD AROUSE THE ENTIRE STATE. BUT IN A HUGE MANSION ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY, A LONE FIGURE SPRINTED UP THE WIDE STAIRWAY AND...
HERE IT IS EIGHT-THIRTY AND SHE'S STILL ASLEEP UPSTAIRS! WELL, I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO WAKE HER UP! BELIEVE ME, TODAY SHE'S GONNA LEARN HOW VALUABLE LITTLE MONK CAN BE TO HER. RUST!
WAKE UP, RUST!
Copper City Express
11 12 1
10 2
9 3
8 4
7 6 5

# CHAPTER 6 The SERPENT COILS

ONLY A FEW MINUTES AFTER THE **EXPRESS** HAD HIT THE STREETS OF COPPER CITY THE TOWN BEGAN TO STIR AND TOSS LIKE A RESTLESS SLEEPER WAKING FROM SOME HORRIBLE DREAM. A RISING TIDE OF ANGER FLOWED OVER THE TOWN, AN ANGRY WAVE THAT THREATENED TO ENGULF THOUSANDS OF LIVES. AS THE **EXPRESS** CLOCK TOLLED 8:30, MONK HASTENED TO ROUSE RUST FROM SLUMBER.




A REAL EYE-OPENER FOR MRS. MASSON'S BREAKFAST. AND JUST WAIT TILL SHE GETS A LOOK AT IT. THEN WE'LL SEE IF SHE CAN DO WITHOUT HER BOY, MONK.
**RUST!** OH, RUST!


OKAY, DUCHESS, THE BALL'S OVER. WAKE UP AND TAKE A GANDER AT THESE HEADLINES. THEN, IF YOU'RE A GOOD GIRL, MAYBE UNCLE MONK WILL PULL YOU OUT OF THE FIRE!
MONK? WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU DOING HERE? WHAT TIME IS IT?

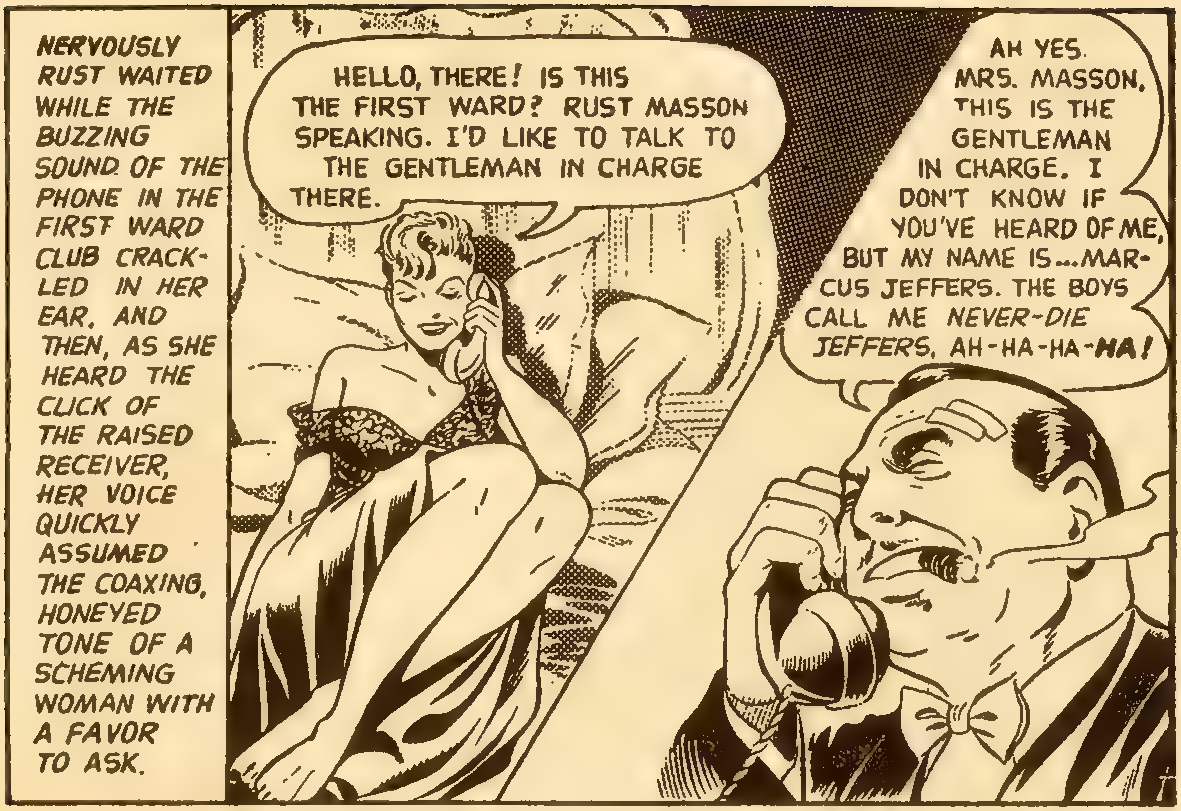
LIKE THE MAN SAYS, BABY, "IT'S LATER THAN YOU THINK!"
SHUT UP, YOU FOOL. LET ME READ. "THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MASSON EMPIRE." HA! THAT IDIOT!
COPPER CITY EXPRESS

BUT LISTEN TO THE NEWS-TIMES EDITORIAL... "EVEN IF ONE TENTH OF WHAT IS SAID ABOUT THE MINES IS TRUE, THE MINERS SHOULD QUIT AND NEVER ENTER THE MINES AGAIN. BUT WE KNOW THEY WON'T BECAUSE THE CHARGES ARE COMPLETELY FALSE."
THAT'S IT, MONK! THE MINERS WOULD NEVER BELIEVE WEBER. HERE... LET ME CALL THE MINE OFFICE.
News-Tim

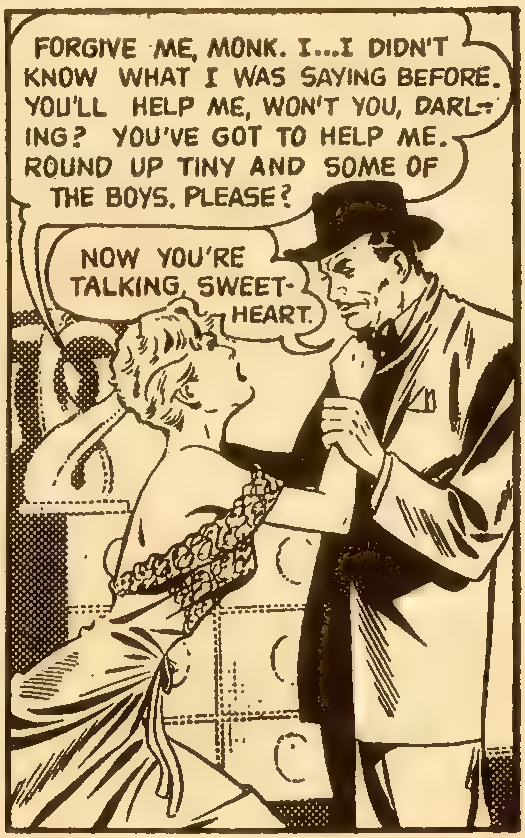
I WISH IT WAS THAT WAY, MRS. MASSON. BUT I'M TELLING YOU, THOSE MINERS ARE MILLING AROUND OUTSIDE RIGHT NOW. THERE'S NOT ONE OF THEM THAT'LL GO BACK INTO THE PITS!

THAT'S HOW IT IS, MRS. MASSON. LOOKS LIKE THE MINERS ARE BELIEVING WEBER'S STORY RIGHT DOWN TO THE LAST LINE.
OKAY, BABY, NOW MAYBE YOU'LL LISTEN TO ME. YOU'LL SEE WHAT A GUY WITH A GUN CAN MEAN TO YOU.
SHUT UP! SHUT UP AND LET ME THINK. OH, THE GALL OF THAT UNGRATEFUL WEBER! THE NERVE OF HIM!
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THINKING, RUST. YOU JUST LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME. ONLY... FIRST I'D LIKE A LITTLE ADVANCE PAYMENT FOR THE JOB... OKAY?
GET YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF ME! YOU THINK I'M BEATEN, DO YOU? YOU THINK I'M UP FOR SALE TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER? WELL, I'LL SHOW YOU. THERE ARE STILL A FEW CARDS LEFT TO PLAY... AND THEY'RE HIGH TRUMPS. NOW GET OUT OF HERE!
OKAY, BABY, OKAY. I CAN WAIT. FOR A WHILE.

I'LL TRY SAM REYNOLDS IN THE THIRD WARD. HE'LL BACK ME UP. WITH HIS HELP I CAN---.
GOLLY... I'M SORRY, MRS. MASSON, POWERFUL SORRY, BUT I CAN'T HELP YOU. LOOKS LIKE THIS WHOLE TOWN'S TURNED AGAINST YOU AND I'M A POLITICIAN. I CAN'T AFFORD TO KNOW YOU. HONEST.
THIRD WARD
PO CAL CLU
C&L
HELLO, FIFTH WARD? LET ME SPEAK TO—. OH, HELLO, PHIL. THIS IS MRS. MASSON.
WHATEVER YOU WANT I AIN'T GOT, RUST. YOU'RE THE KISS OF DEATH IN THIS TOWN. SO LONG.
IF THAT TREACHEROUS WEBER HADN'T MOVED SO FAST! I'VE GOT TO ACT NOW OR—. WAIT, I KNOW! I'LL TRY THE FIRST WARD. JEFFER'S' OLD CLUB. WITH HIM OUT OF THE WAY, IT'LL BE A CINCH TO BRING THE CLUB AROUND TO HELP.


NERVOUSLY RUST WAITED WHILE THE BUZZING SOUND OF THE PHONE IN THE FIRST WARD CLUB CRACKLED IN HER EAR, AND THEN, AS SHE HEARD THE CLICK OF THE RAISED RECEIVER, HER VOICE QUICKLY ASSUMED THE COAXING, HONEYED TONE OF A SCHEMING WOMAN WITH A FAVOR TO ASK.
HELLO, THERE! IS THIS THE FIRST WARD? RUST MASSON SPEAKING. I'D LIKE TO TALK TO THE GENTLEMAN IN CHARGE THERE.
AH YES. MRS. MASSON, THIS IS THE GENTLEMAN IN CHARGE. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'VE HEARD OF ME, BUT MY NAME IS...MARCUS JEFFERS. THE BOYS CALL ME NEVER-DIE JEFFERS, AH-HA-HA-HA!

JEFFERS! ALIVE AND IN TOWN? NO! NO! IT CAN'T BE! MONK! MONK! COME AND HELP ME, MONK I NEED YOU!

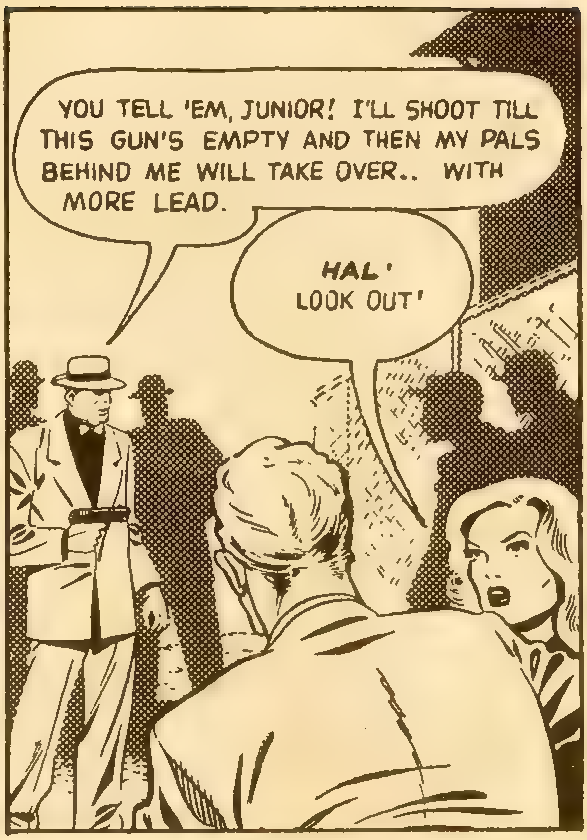

FORGIVE ME, MONK. I...I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS SAYING BEFORE. YOU'LL HELP ME, WON'T YOU, DARLING? YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME. ROUND UP TINY AND SOME OF THE BOYS. PLEASE?
NOW YOU'RE TALKING, SWEETHEART.

YOU'RE RIGHT. AT TIMES LIKE THIS ONLY A MAN WITH A GUN CAN MAKE THOSE COWARDS UNDERSTAND. THEY'LL COWER IN TERROR, ALL OF THEM. I'VE TRIED TO DO THIS PEACEFULLY, BUT NOW I SEE AN IRON HAND IS NEEDED IF I'M TO SHOW THEM WHO'S BOSS!
MMM. VERY NICE. READY, BABY?
LET YOURSELF GO, SWEETHEART. LET'S HAVE SOME OF THE STUFF YOU GAVE WEBER.
MONK, PLEASE! WE HAVEN'T GOT TIME FOR THAT NOW. WE'VE GOT TO GET GOING. LATER, MONK, AFTER EVERYTHING'S SETTLED.
DRESSED FOR ACTION, EH, BABY? THIS BURG'S BUZZING LIKE A DEBUTANT'S PHONE. I GOTTA HUNCH YOU'LL GET ANY ACTION YOU'RE LOOKING FOR. WHERE TO?
WHERE TO? WHY THE MINES, OF COURSE. WE'RE GOING TO TEACH THIS TOWN A LESSON IT'LL NEVER FORGET!
THE BIG CONVERTIBLE ROARED OFF TOWARD THE MINES AS MONK SHOVED THE HEAVY CAR TO ITS SPEED LIMIT. HE WATCHED RUST OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE AND SAW A WIERD SMILE STEAL ACROSS HER FACE... A SMILE THAT HAD BEEN THERE THE NIGHT WHEN HER STEP-DAUGHTER HAD PRONOUNCED HER... MAD!

NOW, GET THIS. WE HAVE THE FORCE TO CARRY THIS THING THROUGH... IF WE DON'T LOSE OUR HEADS. IF ONE OF THOSE MINERS STEPS OUT OF LINE, SHOOT HIM DOWN. THERE'LL BE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. WE CAN'T AFFORD TO SHOW THE SLIGHTEST BIT OF WEAKNESS, UNDERSTAND?
HOLD ON, RUST. THIS IS MY CAPER AND I CALL THE TURNS. NOW, LOOK, YOU TWO, I DON'T WANT NO SHOOTING PARTY. A ROD IS TWICE AS IMPORTANT IF YOU DON'T SHOOT IT. SO... SHOW YOUR ARTILLERY, KEEP IT IN SIGHT. MAKE THE BUMS SHAKE IN THEIR BOOTS. BUT DON'T SHOOT UNLESS YOU HAVE TO. GET ME?
SURE, MONK, SURE! WE'LL JUST BE A COUPLE OF BOY SCOUTS, WON'T WE, JOE?
YEAH-H-H, A COUPLE BOY SCOUTS. HA-HA!

THE ROLLING ARSENAL PULLED UP TO THE GATE OF THE MASSON MINING COMPANY AND RUST STEPPED OUT FOLLOWED BY HER LITTLE ARMY. A MOB OF SURLY-FACED MEN ADVANCED ON THEM AND THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH DEATHLY SILENCE. SUDDENLY, AS SHE WAS RECOGNIZED, A CRY TORE FROM THE CROWD, AND . . .
LOOK! IT'S THE MASSON WOMAN!
THAT'S RIGHT, GENTLEMEN, IT'S MRS. MASSON--HERE TO KNOCK A LITTLE SENSE INTO YOUR HEADS. THE TIME FOR PATIENCE AND REASONING HAS PASSED. THESE MEN WITH ME ARGUE WITH THEIR GUNS. IF I GIVE THE WORD, THEY'LL--!
DON'T WAIT TILL THEY SHOOT US DOWN LIKE DOGS! COME ON BOYS, LET'S GET 'EM!
THE ONLY THING YOU'LL GET IS LEAD...IN THE STOMACH!
THE DIRTY RAT! DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME BOYS. GET HIM... GET HIM!
JOE, YOU STUPID JERK. WHAT'D I TELL YOU?

OKAY, YOU COPPER MONKEYS! IF YOU WANNA BE A HERO LIKE THAT ONE ON THE GROUND, JUST COME RIGHT AHEAD. I GOT MORE HERO-MAKERS IN THIS GUN AND I AIM TO PLEASE.
LOOK OUT! HE'LL SHOOT AGAIN!

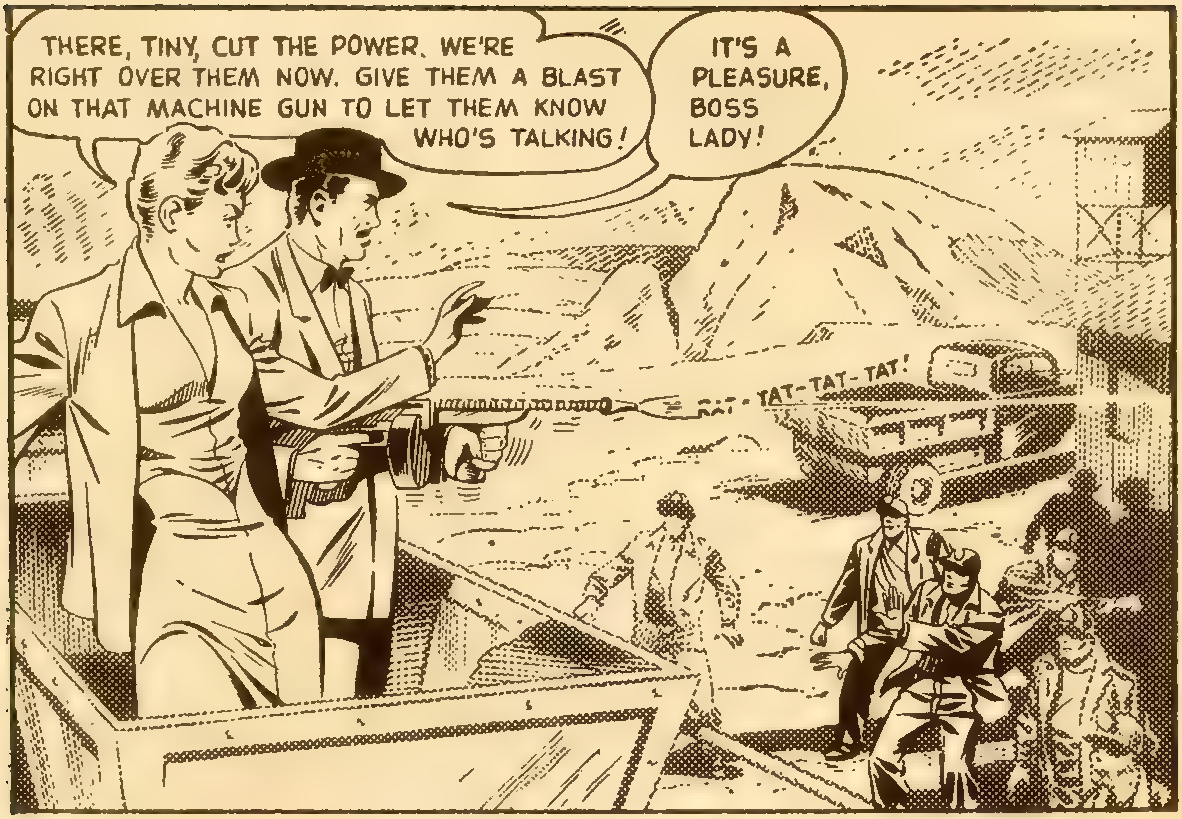

YOU TELL 'EM, JUNIOR! I'LL SHOOT TILL THIS GUN'S EMPTY AND THEN MY PALS BEHIND ME WILL TAKE OVER.. WITH MORE LEAD.
HAL! LOOK OUT!

TURN ON YOUR FIELD-LIGHTS, BUDDY. I'M COMING IN FOR A LANDING!
HAL!
WHAT THE---!?

LET'S SEE HOW YOU OPERATE WITHOUT A GUN, FRIEND. NOT SO TOUGH, EH? WELL, MAYBE THIS'LL TOUGHEN YOU YOU UP A BIT.
OW-W-W! STOP IT! I GIVE UP! STOP IT!

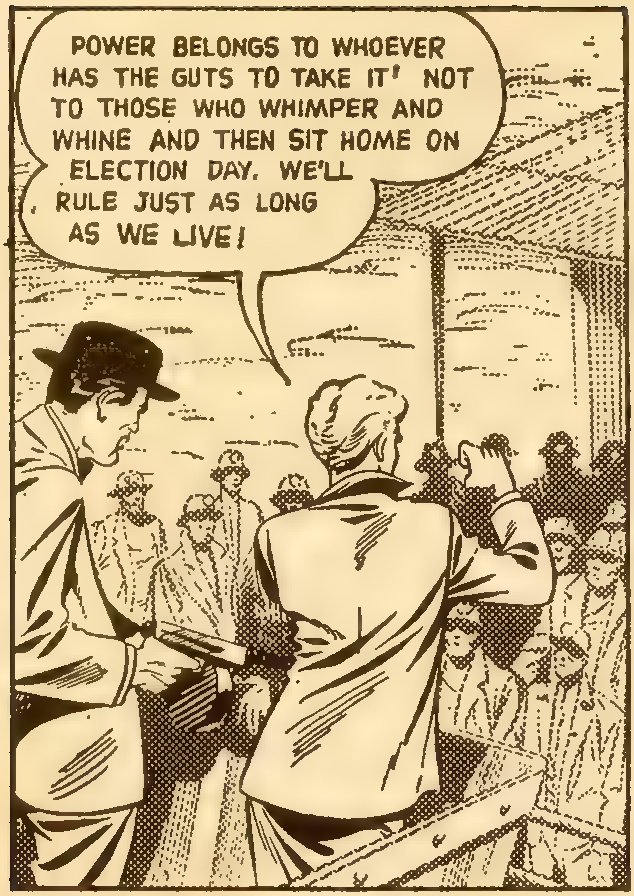
YOU'RE A HARD-BOILED EGG, ALL RIGHT. THIN SHELL AND YELLOW INSIDE!
MONK! TINY! FOLLOW ME. WE'RE NOT THROUGH YET!
COMING, RUST!
Y'GOT A PLAN, RUST? THAT STUPID JOE CRAMPED OUR STYLE. THESE MINER GUYS GOT US OUT-NUMBERED A HUNDRED TO ONE.
BUT THEY'RE NOT ARMED, WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THEIR REACH!
THE BUCKETS! THEY'RE BIG ENOUGH. THAT'S IT, MONK! WE'LL CLIMB INTO ONE OF THE BUCKETS AND TINY CAN OPERATE THE CONTROL BOARD.
COME ON! I'LL EXPLAIN LATER!

CUT THE POWER AS SOON AS WE'RE DIRECTLY ABOVE THE CROWD, TINY. IF YOU LEAVE IT ON TOO LONG, THE CAR WILL DUMP US OVER THE RIDGE. WE CAN TALK TO THEM FROM UP HERE AND THEY'LL HAVE TO LISTEN.
DON'T WORRY, RUST, I KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THESE THINGS.
ALL ABOARD FOR THE RUST MASSON SPECIAL --- HAW HAW. I'LL BET RUST IS THE BEST LOOKING LOAD THAT CAR EVER CARRIED, AND THE TOUGHEST AT THAT!
WE'LL SHOW THOSE FOOLS WHO'S RUNNING THIS TOWN. WHEN WE GET DONE WITH THEM THEY'LL WISH THEY NEVER STARTED THIS THING!
I'M WITH YOU, RUST. YOU'RE ONE DAME WHO PLAYS HER CARDS RIGHT DOWN TO THE END.


THERE, TINY, CUT THE POWER. WE'RE RIGHT OVER THEM NOW. GIVE THEM A BLAST ON THAT MACHINE GUN TO LET THEM KNOW WHO'S TALKING!
IT'S A PLEASURE, BOSS LADY!
RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT!

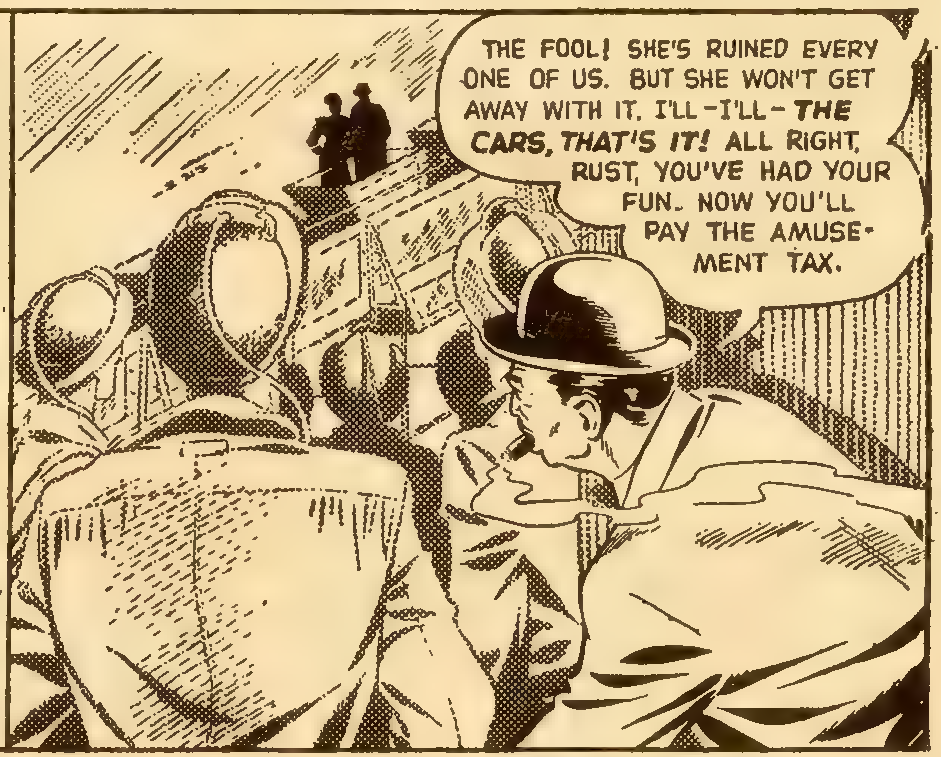
LISTEN, YOU FOOLS! THIS IS RUST MASSON TALKING! RUST MASSON, THE WOMAN WHO OWNS THIS TOWN AND EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD IN IT!

HAL, SHE'S BABBLING INSANELY. RUST HAS GONE STARK RAVING MAD!
THAT ISN'T NEWS, HONEY. SHE'S BEEN MAD FOR A LONG TIME... ONLY WE'VE JUST COME TO REALIZE IT.


POWER BELONGS TO WHOEVER HAS THE GUTS TO TAKE IT! NOT TO THOSE WHO WHIMPER AND WHINE AND THEN SIT HOME ON ELECTION DAY. WE'LL RULE JUST AS LONG AS WE LIVE!

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO TAKE CONTROL AND KEEP IT? WITH BULLETS NOT BALLOTS JEFFERS KILLED MALONE WHO RULED THE WARD BEFORE HIM AND HE'S DONE AWAY WITH A DOZEN WHO GOT IN HIS WAY SINCE THAT'S HOW POWER IS HELD

*AT THAT MOMENT, AS IF BY SOME FATAL APPOINTMENT, A FRENZIED MARCUS JEFFERS ARRIVED UPON THE SCENE IN TIME TO HEAR RUST MADLY EXPOSING THE POLITICAL OPERATIONS OF THE MASSON MACHINE. LISTENING TO THE CRAZED WOMAN HE REALIZED THAT HER WORDS WOULD DESTROY EVERYTHING HE HAD PLANNED, UNLESS..*


THE FOOL! SHE'S RUINED EVERY ONE OF US. BUT SHE WON'T GET AWAY WITH IT. I'LL-I'LL-THE CARS, THAT'S IT! ALL RIGHT, RUST, YOU'VE HAD YOUR FUN. NOW YOU'LL PAY THE AMUSEMENT TAX.

YOU'LL HAVE A HEADACHE IN THE MORNING, TINY. BUT NOT HALF AS BIG AS THE ONE RUST HAS COMING TO HER.
HERE YOU GO, MY DEAR MRS. MASSON. FOR A SHORT RIDE AND A LONG FALL! SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT THIS WITH YOUR BLACKMAIL PAPERS AND YOUR THUGS AND YOUR DIRTY MACHINE! GOODBYE, MY DEAR!
MONK, WE'RE MOVING! IT'S MARCUS! HE'S TURNED ON THE POWER AGAIN! WE'LL BE KILLED...THE CONTROL BOARD. YOU'VE GOT TO SHOOT IT UP BEFORE THE CAR DROPS US!
I'LL GET IT, RUST! DON'T WORRY!

AGH-H-H-H!
RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT!

YOU FOOL! WE'RE MOVING! YOU HIT HIM AND HE'S FALLEN OVER THE BOARD! YOU CAN'T SHOOT UP THE CONTROLS NOW!
RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT!

NO, IT'S TOO LATE! HA-HA-HA! JEFFERS HAS COME BACK FROM THE DEAD! HA-HA-HA! COME BACK TO TAKE US WITH HIM... HA-HA-HA-HA!

NO... NO! I CAN'T DIE... NOT THIS WAY! I WON'T DIE! I WON'T... I WON'T!

AAIIEEE!
AAAIIEEE!

OH, HAL, I CAN'T LOOK AT HER. I DON'T EVER WANT TO SEE HER AGAIN.
DON'T WORRY, HONEY, YOU WON'T HAVE TO SEE HER ... EVER AGAIN!
BROTHER, THERE GOES ONE HELL OF A GUY!
YEP, YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN, BUB.
THREE CHEERS FOR HAL WEBER!
GOT TO DO MORE THAN CHEER HIM. WE GOTTA GET BEHIND HIM!
RIGHT!
YES SIR, WITH FOLKS BEHIND HIM, THAT WEBER COULD BE THE NEXT MAYOR OF COPPER CITY.
WHY STOP AT MAYOR, SONNY? THAT BOY CAN GO JEST AS FAR AS HE WANTS TO, LONG AS HE FIGHTS FOR WHAT'S RIGHT.

IN THE HOURS THAT FOLLOWED, COPPER CITY SHOOK WITH THE REVERBERATIONS OF POLITICAL UPHEAVAL. GRAFTING POLICE OFFICIALS FOUND THEMSELVES JOBLESS AS STARTLED YOUNG OFFICERS REPLACED THEM. HOODLUMS, LIKE JEFFERS' THUGS, WHO HAD ONCE KNOWN POLICE PROTECTION WERE NOW HERDED INTO JAIL CELLS. OUTGOING TRAINS WERE CRAMMED WITH SHADY CHARACTERS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE. AND, AS EVENING CAME, THE TWO PEOPLE MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS DAY OF RECKONING QUIETLY REVIEWED THE AFFAIR AT AUDREY'S LAKESIDE COTTAGE.

IT'S BEEN QUITE A DAY, HAL WHAT HAPPENED AT THE MINES THIS MORNING IS LIKE SOME BAD DREAM. IT...IT DOESN'T SEEM REAL.

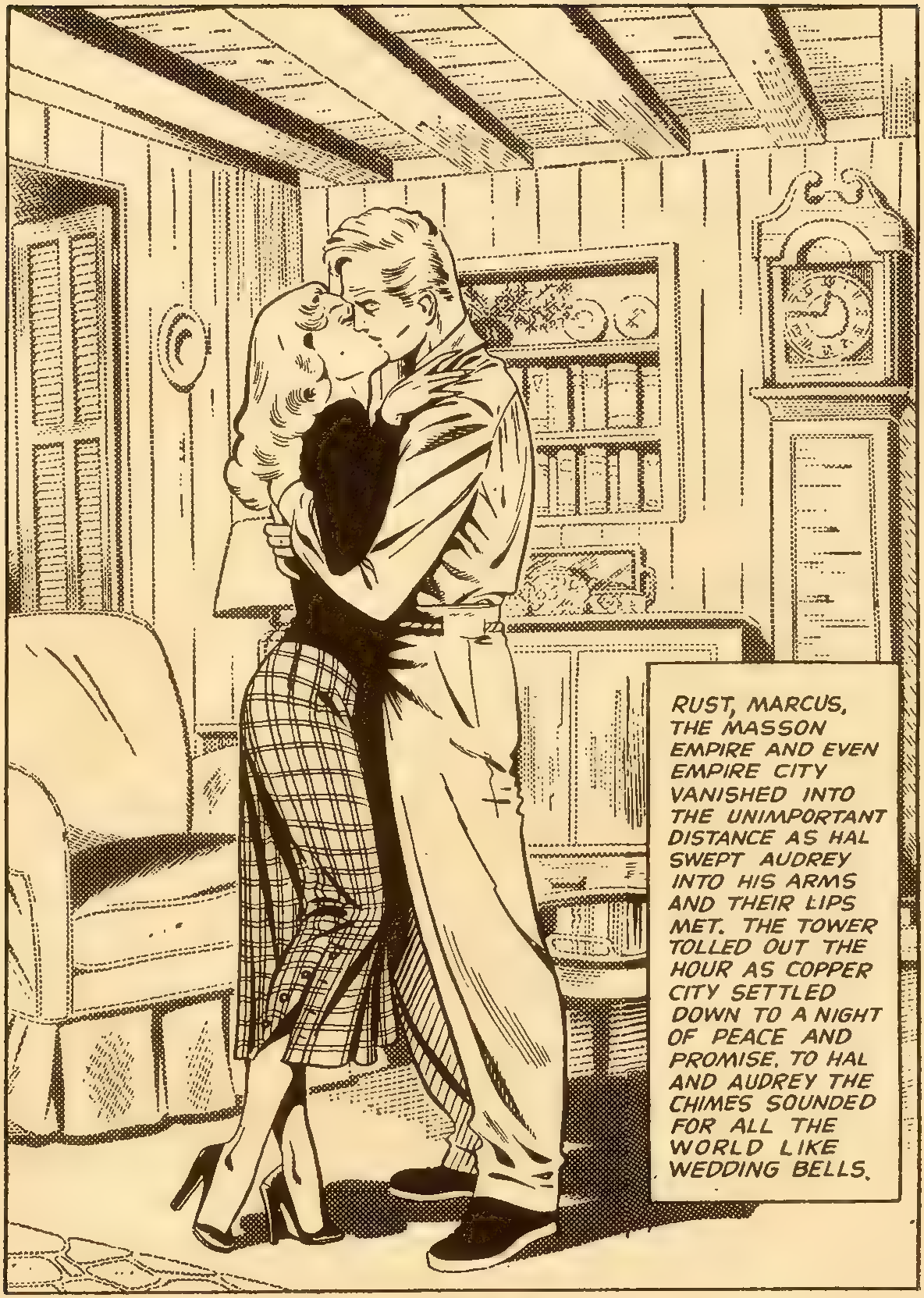
BUT IT WAS, AUDREY. IT WAS ALL REAL. MONK.. TINY... JEFFERS, AND... AND RUST. SHE MOST OF ALL.

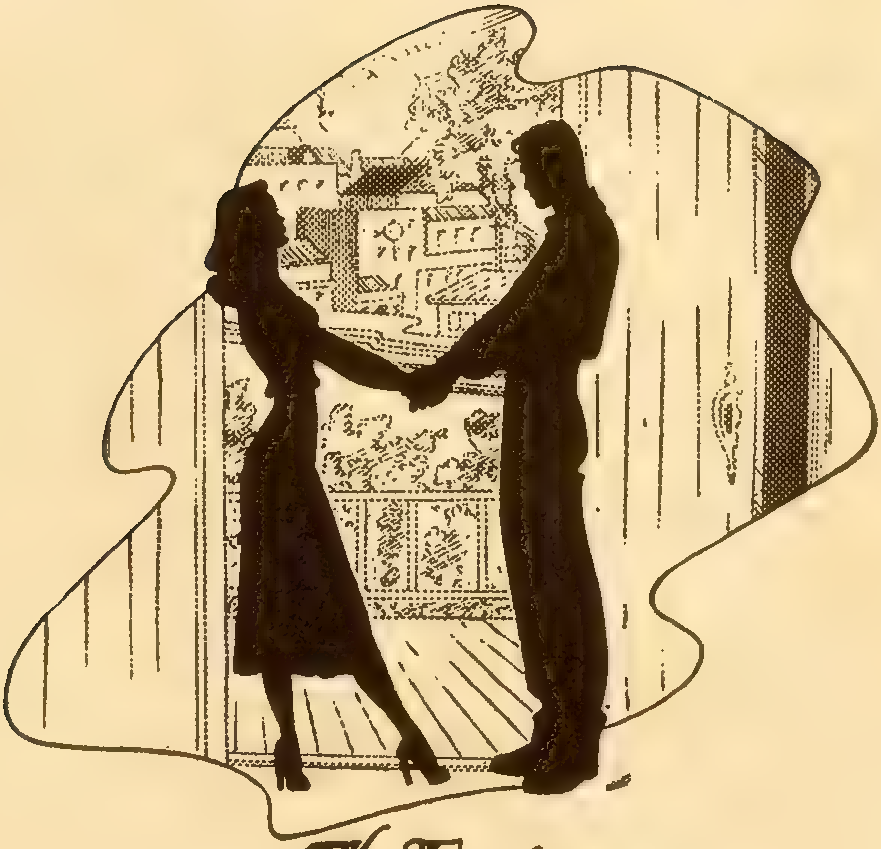
HAL, DARLING, ARE YOU SURE YOU STILL DON'T FEEL A SMALL SPARK OF THE LOVE YOU ONCE HAD FOR... FOR ***HER***?

I DON'T THINK I EVER ***LOVED*** HER. REAL LOVE HAS TO BE RETURNED. AND RUST COULDN'T LOVE ANYTHING BUT POWER.

SHE NAMED HERSELF WELL... "*RUST*." IT RHYMES WITH *LUST*. THE MAD LUST FOR POWER THAT FINALLY DESTROYED HER. BUT WE'VE GOT TO FORGET HER NOW.

OH, HAL!


RUST, MARCUS, THE MASSON EMPIRE AND EVEN EMPIRE CITY VANISHED INTO THE UNIMPORTANT DISTANCE AS HAL SWEPT AUDREY INTO HIS ARMS AND THEIR LIPS MET. THE TOWER TOLLED OUT THE HOUR AS COPPER CITY SETTLED DOWN TO A NIGHT OF PEACE AND PROMISE. TO HAL AND AUDREY THE CHIMES SOUNDED FOR ALL THE WORLD LIKE WEDDING BELLS.



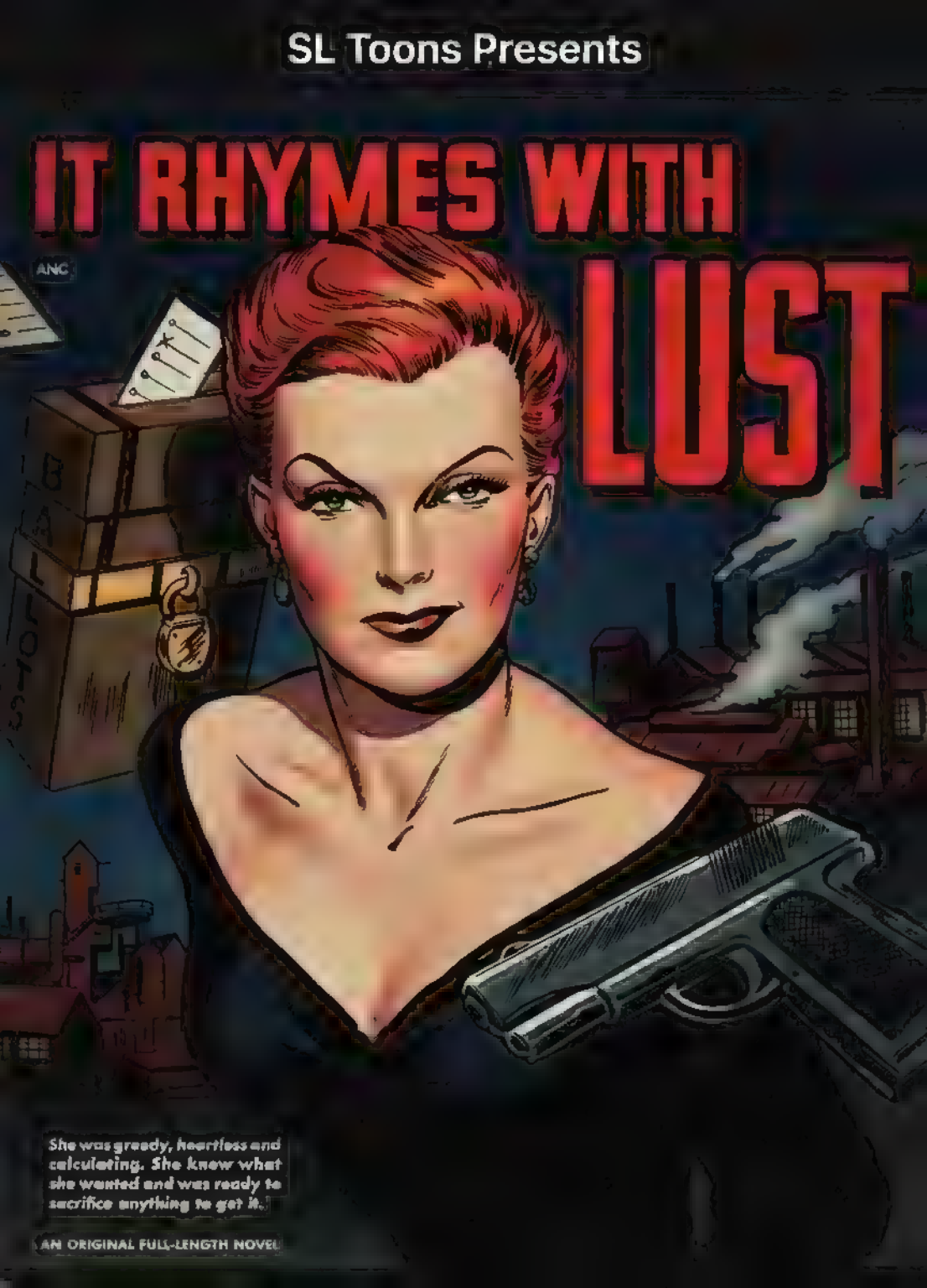
The End

PICTURE NOVELS

# LOST

SL Toons Presents

# IT RHYMES WITH LUST



She was greedy, heartless and calculating. She knew what she wanted and was ready to sacrifice anything to get it.

AN ORIGINAL FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

SL Toons Presents • Narrated by Felix Lubezki

# IT RHYMES WITH LUST

## The Complete Story

ANC
LUST
She was greedy, heartless and calculating. She knew what she wanted and was ready to sacrifice anything to get it.
AN ORIGINAL FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

SL Toons Presents • Narrated by Felix Lubezki

# IT RHYMES WITH LUST

## FULL PAGE-BY-PAGE READING

1 Hour 28 Minutes

PICTURE NOVELS

# IT RHYMES WITH LUST

25¢

ANC

*She was greedy, heartless and calculating. She knew what she wanted and was ready to sacrifice anything to get it.*

AN ORIGINAL FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

**COPPER CITY!...** CORRUPT CROSS-ROADS OF POWER AND TREACHERY, WHERE VOLUPTUOUS ***RUST MASSON*** RULED THE ROOST. WITH THE STRENGTH OF HER POLITICAL MACHINE AND THE CUNNING OF HER ANIMAL GRACE, RUST CONTROLLED THE TURBULENT METROPOLIS EVEN AS SHE DID THE LIFE OF

**HAL WEBER...** HANDSOME, CYNICAL NEWSPAPERMAN WHO BLASTED THE PROMISE OF HIS CAREER FOR HER FATAL EMBRACES. AND THEN, MIRRORING THE TORMENT OF HIS LIFE, IN WALKED ANOTHER LOVE, BRIGHT, FRESH, EXCITING, THE LOVE OF

**AUDREY MASSON...** LOVELY YOUNG STEP-DAUGHTER OF RUST, AGAINST WHOM SHE FOUGHT COURAGEOUSLY FOR THE SOUL OF THE MAN THEY BOTH DESIRED. BUT RUST NEVER FOUGHT ALONE. ALWAYS BY HER SIDE WAS THE LEERING FACE OF

**MONK SHIRL...** TIGHT-LIPPED KILLER WHOSE GUN WAS FOR HIRE TO RUST ALONE .. AND NOT MERELY FOR MONEY. ALIVE TO HIS HALF-CRAZED LONGING FOR HER, RUST USED HIM AS HER HIGH TRUMP IN THE DANGEROUS GAME SHE PLAYED WITH

**MARCUS JEFFERS...** EVIL POLITICAL GENIUS WHO RULED THE TEEMING FIRST-WARD MACHINE AS HE WAITED HIS CHANCE TO INHERIT THE BURSTING TREASURE-CHEST THAT WAS... ***COPPER CITY!***